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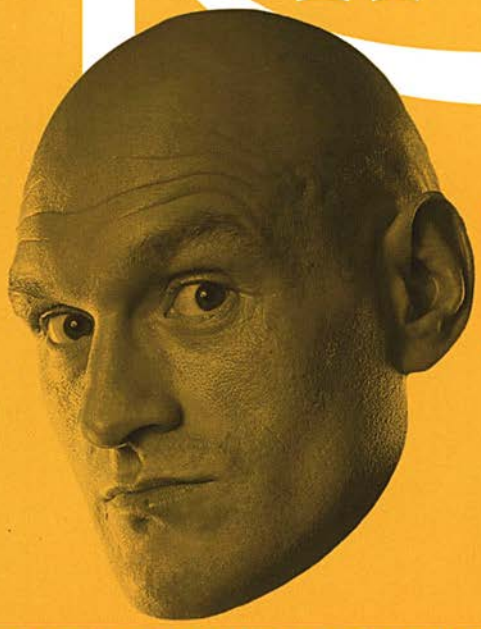
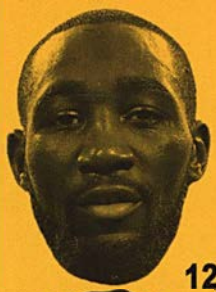


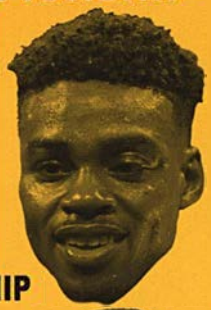
TYSON FURY VS. OLEKSANDR USYK

MAIN EVENT FOR THE UNDISPUTED HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

3 CO-FEATURE BOUTS



TERENCE CRAWFORD VS. ERROL SPENCE JR.



12 ROUNDS FOR THE RING MAGAZINE WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

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SUGAR RAY LEONARD'S GREATEST HITS / **MYTHICAL MATCHUP: GREB VS. KETCHEL**

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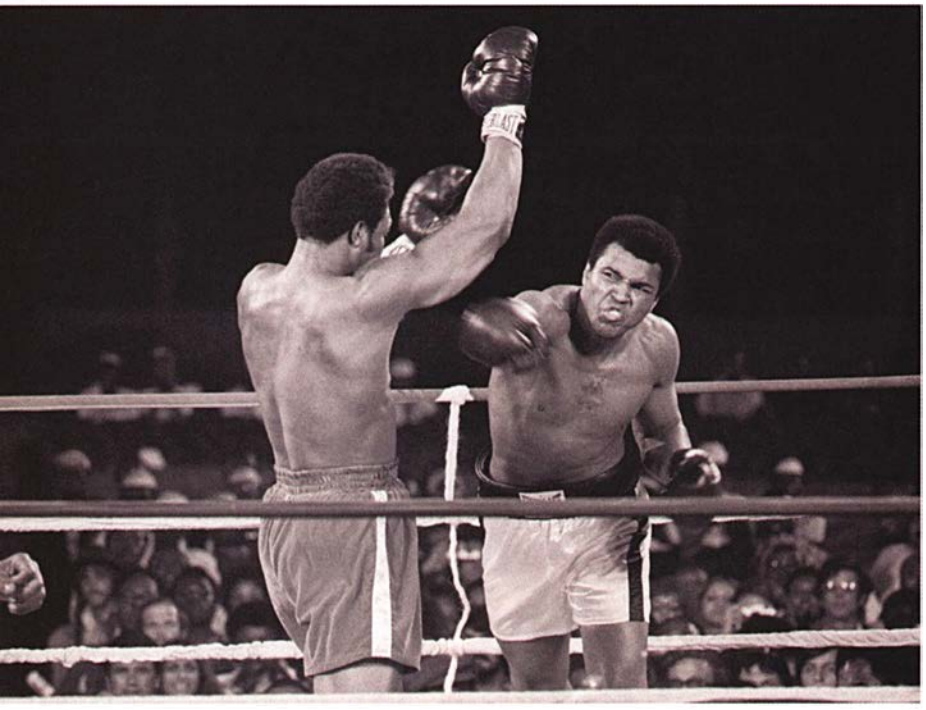
COVER PHOTOS BY FURY/CRAWFORD (MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK); USYK (© WOJTEK URBANEK); SPENCE JR. (JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/GETTY IMAGES); CANELO (ED MULHOLLAND); BETERBIEV (VALERY SHARIFULIN\TASS VIA GETTY IMAGES); DAVIS (MIKE STOBE/GETTY IMAGES); GARCIA (SYE WILLIAMS)

WBO light heavyweight titleholder Joe Smith Jr. (right) was all set to make his maiden defense against dangerous Brit Callum Johnson when the latter tested positive for COVID-19. Gallant late replacement Steve Geffrard filled the void and was stopped in nine rounds..

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK



THE GREAT DEBATE CONTINUES

I have been an avid reader of The Ring since being able to spend my hard-earned pocket money on issues in the late 1980s. I read Mr. J.P. Sandy's words on Muhammad Ali being "overrated" with great interest in the December 2021 issue ("Come Out Writing"). I wouldn't dream of claiming to know more than a gentleman who has been following boxing since the 1960s and would possibly have been around to see many of the Ali fights firsthand, but I do take umbrage with his comparing Ali's performances against certain fighters to those by some of his contemporary greats against the same men. Yes, George Foreman made lighter work of both Ken Norton and Joe Frazier, but what relevance does that have when Ali ended up beating Foreman? Styles make fights. As for the assertion that some of Ali's opponents were unknown/unheralded, I'd have thought that Mr. Sandy had been following the sport for long enough to appreciate that just because a fighter may be unheard of or unheralded, it doesn't mean they're no good.

Derek Morriss
London

TITO OVER THOMAS

I just read the letter in the March 2022 magazine ("Come Out Writing") written by James McManus from Philadelphia on Joe Calzaghe's ranking at the top of the 168-pound division being an absolute joke ("Division by Division," December 2021 issue). The Ring Magazine's response by writer Anson Wainwright was that while Roy Jones Jr. was "otherworldly good at 168, it was the panel's belief that his resume wasn't as good at this weight."

So now I am left scratching my head, because when I flipped to the next page where the welterweights are listed, I see that the second-longest reigning welterweight champion of all time does not even make the top 5. While I don't believe that it is an absolute joke, I do believe that Felix "Tito" Trinidad should be ranked higher than Thomas "Hitman" Hearns in the welterweight rankings.

Based off of your judging criteria, how do you then justify Trinidad being only an honorable mention at 147 when his "resume" at this weight far exceeds that of Hearns, who while no slouch and an all-time great fighter in his own right, does not compare to the accomplishments of Trinidad at welterweight?

Felix Trinidad: Title reign at 147 pounds was 80 months with 15 successful title defenses.

Thomas Hearns: Title reign at 147 pounds was 13 months with three successful defenses.

Was this one based off of the eye test? I do believe this fight would've been a pick 'em fight of left hook vs. right hand. But I digress. Your thoughts?

Felix Castillo
Chicago

WRITER ANSON WAINWRIGHT'S RESPONSE: Thanks for your email, Felix. You make a good point in the comparison of Calzaghe/Jones and Hearns/Trinidad. I believe the panel looked at each case seperately rather than comparatvely, and that is how they came up with the decision. Is that a contradiction? Yes, but that was the mood of the voting panel.

At super middleweight, you either liked Calzaghe's longevity or Jones' fleeting brilliance. While Jones' dominant win over Toney was one of the best wins in the division's history, the feeling of some was that Jones did his best work at 175 and omitted him, which ultimately cost him the top spot. Calzaghe had the numbers and ultimately unified and scored an outstanding win over the then-feared Jeff Lacy as an underdog and also a virtuoso win over previously unbeaten Mikkel Kessler to cap his super middleweight run.

The consensus felt as though Hearns running Leonard close and blowing away the competition

BETTMANN

deserved to be top 5. Trinidad has a really good resume at 147 – underrated, in fact. It was a close-run thing. What can I say? People put a lot of stock in Hearns' performance against Leonard.

OPINIONS!

I just wanted to express my feelings about your top 100 list of all-time fighters. As a fan of boxing for 40-plus years, I consider myself to be pretty knowledgeable on the sport I love so much. I know it is all about opinions, and I had to express mine. First of all, to have Larry Holmes as No. 31 is ridiculous! You rank old-time fighters ahead of modern fighters way too much! To have Tony Canzoneri as No. 4 is insane! I got so annoyed reading this issue. It is crazy! Jimmy McLarnin No. 13! What a joke!!! Young Corbett No. 24! How about George Foreman? Not even on your list! Please next year do some research before you print another stupid list!

Ken Lombardo

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: There are dissertations on American history that employ less research than Mr. Rold's feature, for which he spent three years going over the entire library of Ring magazines in order to compile his list. If it lacks for anything, it is simplicity, and the result has frustrated more than a few readers. But let's try to be clear on exactly what is being ranked. As Cliff wrote in his introduction:

"For those who take a moment to understand what this is, versus what it's not, there should be plenty to enjoy and it will alleviate some reader anxiety (No Sandy Saddler?! Where is George Foreman?!). This is a study of fighter performance using The Ring's ratings – from the divisional rankings' debut within the pages of the February 1925 issue to today – as the central gauge."

Put another way, his piece was designed to fit in the 100th-year anniversary issue of The Ring, and as such it is specific to the contents of this magazine, not necessarily boxing itself. It's a fine line, but an important one. As you know, our ratings have long been a reference point for boxing fans and pundits and have always been an authoritative way to designate "the best." But all ratings reflect the state of the game at that time. The fighters in Rold's list were judged purely on their results against fighters who were ranked by The Ring on the day of their encounter, not the entirety of those opponents' careers, which would've considered who they would become or who they once were. It also did not score things like the number of belts held or the length of title reigns.

As it is described at the top of the first page, this is a list that honors the credo "To be the best, you have to beat the best." At the risk of tooting our own horn (or exposing ourselves to criticism), we decided to use our own track record to pick out which victories qualified.

Just finished reading your 100-year anniversary issue. What a wonderful job you have done compiling one hundred years into a single issue. I bought my first issue of The Ring Magazine and Boxing Illustrated in April 1962 at Mike's newsstand in Miami Beach. Sixty years later, I have not missed a single issue of The Ring. What's more is that, at 72, I still get the same thrill when I receive the monthly issue in my mailbox as I did when, as a kid, the new issue would hit the newsstands! Boxing has been a big part of my life for as long as I can remember, and I still say that I really learned how to read and write English from Nat Fleischer and Stanley Weston! Thanks for keeping the tradition alive!

Ramiro Ortiz

WRITE TO THE RING! Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209 comeoutwriting@gmail.com
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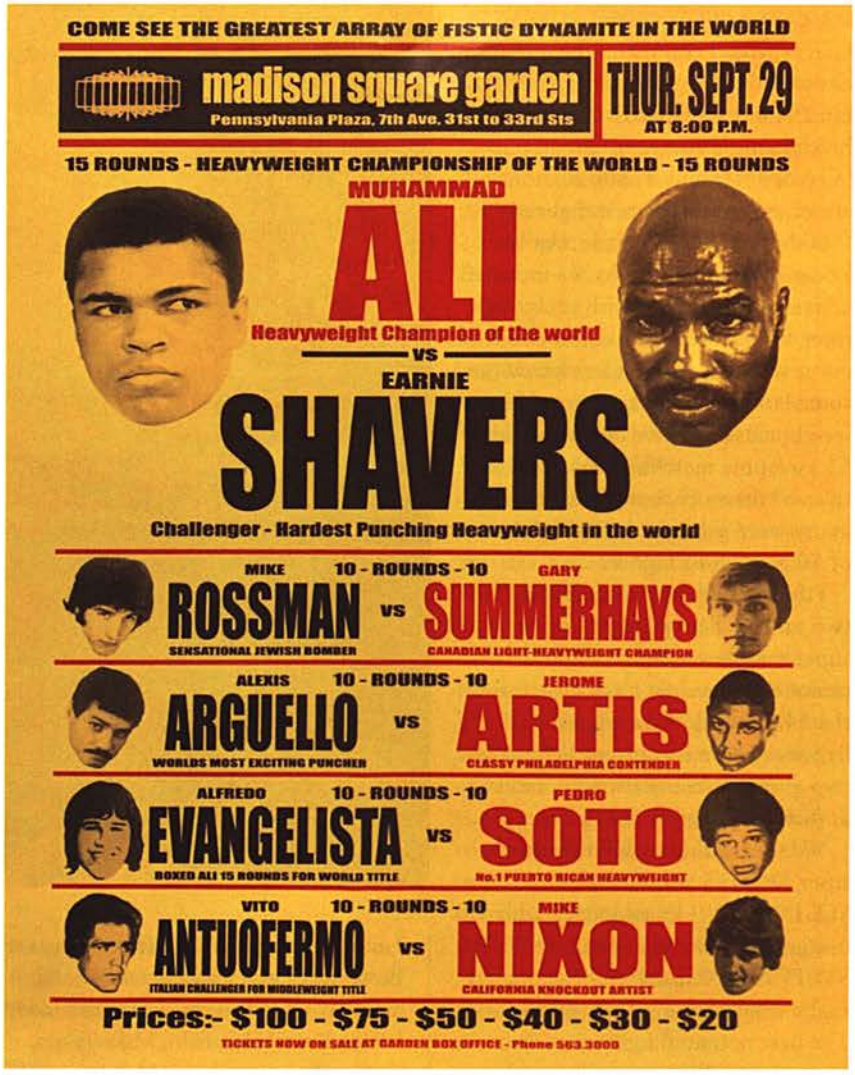
RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

NEVER STOP DREAMING



I hope you have as much fun reading this month's cover story as we did coming up with sensational, intriguing and significant matchups in each weight class (which isn't as easy as you might think, especially when it comes to the strawweight division).

You know me, I'm a huge fan of mythical matchups. They always bring a smile to my face when I encounter them on social media and I even enjoy the endless debates/arguments over who would win and why. However, the matchups we came up with for the cover story are different from the delightful Harry Greb vs. Stanley Ketchel tale that frequent contributor Ron Lipton spun for us on page 62.

Thinking about the blockbuster matchups that adorn the cover to this magazine – Tyson Fury vs. Oleksandr Usyk, Canelo Alvarez vs. Artur Beterbiev and Gervonta Davis vs. Ryan Garcia – made me kind of sad, because they are potential fights that could and SHOULD be made but probably won't happen this year (if ever).

I'm not saying these superbouts should all be on one ultimate fight card, as the old-school boxing poster cover concept suggests. I'm saying each fight could headline its own event this year. Can you imagine if all three took place in 2022 – one in the spring, one in late summer, and

The Holyfield-Bowe rivalry produced incredible action.

one in the fall or winter? Hardcore fans would be buzzing all year. The star power of Fury, Canelo, Davis and Garcia would command the attention of mainstream media and casual fans. The fighters, promoters and broadcast platforms would all pull in record revenue. That's what it's all about, right? This is prizefighting.

It should be that simple, but we know it isn't. That's why we included a "feasibility rating" with each of the three fights for each division in our cover story. As our readers know (and some lament), there are 17 modern weight classes, so we came up with 51 awesome matchups. I don't want to spoil the story, but guess how many were given a "feasibility rating" of 70 percent or higher?

Fifteen. Two at cruiserweight, two at light heavyweight, one at super middleweight, all three at junior welterweight (let's hear it for the 140-pound division!), one at lightweight, two at junior lightweight, two at junior bantamweight and two at junior flyweight. That's it.

We were going to call the cover story FIGHTS WE WANT TO SEE IN 2022 (I know, not terribly original), but we changed it to THE STUFF OF DREAMS. Unfortunately, that's where boxing is at right now. The best potential fights that can be made are about as realistic as mythical matchups.

If I'm to be honest with Ring Magazine readers, I have to admit that I've given up on one day seeing Terence Crawford vs. Errol Spence Jr. I've already stashed that incredible welterweight showdown under the "Big Ones That Got Away" file in my head. There are some glorious whoppers – from Riddick Bowe vs. Lennox Lewis to Anthony Joshua vs. Deontay Wilder – that wound up in that file.

However, I'm not going to make this a negative column. I'm going to inject some balance and hope into it by pointing out that while Joshua-Wilder didn't happen when it should have, we still got the Fury-Wilder trilogy, which was special. We never got Bowe-Lewis, but we were treated to the great Bowe-Evander Holyfield trilogy and an amazing round robin that included Lewis, Bowe, Holyfield, Mike Tyson, George Foreman, Larry Holmes, Ray Mercer, Frank Bruno, Tommy Morrison, Michael Moorer, Oliver McCall, Razor Ruddock, Bert Cooper and other heavyweight standouts.

That 1990s heavyweight magic is what we need now. If the stars of the glamour divisions don't align for mega-fights, the fans (especially us diehards) still need the supporting players – contenders, fringe contenders, prospects, gatekeepers, etc. – of each weight class to get it on.

Heavyweight up-and-comer Tony Yoka recently displayed some '90s spirit by accepting the IBF's invitation to face Filip Hrgovic (Ring's No. 9 contender) in a title-elimination bout for their belt (currently held by Usyk). Ring-rated Joseph Parker (No. 5) and Luis Ortiz (No. 7) were first offered the Hrgovic bout but said "no thanks."

Major props to Hrgovic and Yoka. Hopefully, their respective promoters/managers can work out a deal. And hopefully we witness more of this spirit in other weight classes. Read our cover story for the dream matchups of each division. I'm going to point out the supporting players in the original eight weight classes (I don't have the space to include all 17) that I'd like to see make some bold moves in 2022.

Heavyweight – We've already got Hrgovic and Yoka willing to earn their shot at Usyk. I'd like to see Joe Joyce (Ring's No. 8 contender) take on Parker or Frank Sanchez (No. 10) to determine a mandatory challenger for Usyk's WBO belt. (All three are rated in the WBO's top five.)

Light heavyweight – While we wait for Beterbiev, Dmitry Bivol and Joe Smith Jr. to unify their world titles, let's see Ring's No. 9-rated Joshua Buatsi take on fellow Brits Anthony Yarde (No. 8) or Callum Johnson.

HOLLY STEIN

Middleweight – Kudos to Jaime Munguia for keeping busy. His bout with unbeaten D'Mitrius Ballard on February 19 in his native Tijuana (scheduled at press time) is his third in a nine-month span, but I'd like to see Ring's No. 4 contender aim for better competition going forward. If Munguia's not going to force a mandatory shot at WBO beltholder Demetrius Andrade, he should target Zhanibek Alimkhanuly (No. 6), Chris Eubank Jr. (No. 7) or Carlos Adames (No. 8).

Welterweight – We all consider Jaron Ennis and Vergil Ortiz Jr., Ring's Nos. 4 and 5 contenders, the Heirs Apparent to the 147-pound division. Why wait any longer? Ennis should push for a mandatory shot at Spence. Ortiz should go for Crawford. If title shots can't be made, both should target fellow contenders: Eimantas Stanionis (No. 6), David Avanesyan (No. 7), and Radzhab Butaev (No. 8).

Lightweight – Please, please, please give me this perfect boxer-vs.-puncher/pressure fighter matchup: Frank Martin (the slick southpaw who can crack – see Fighter of the Month on page 12) vs. William Zepeda (the heavy-handed volume puncher).

Featherweight – It's time for Ruben Villa to get back on the saddle. His first loss, a majority decision to Ring's No. 1-rated Emanuel Navarrete, doesn't look so bad considering the drubbings the WBO beltholder gave Christopher Diaz and Joet Gonzalez. Who's out there for the stylish Villa? How about fellow Navarrete victim Isaac Dogboe, who is 3-0 since being stopped by the Mexican windmill in 2019?

Bantamweight – Takuma Inoue was The Ring's 2015 Prospect of the Year. I don't want to call The Monster's little bro a "bust," because he didn't embarrass himself in his lone loss – to then-WBC titleholder Nordine Oubaali via unanimous decision in the co-feature to big bro's 2019 Fight of the Year with Nonito Donaire – but it's time for him to step it up again. Jason Moloney, who took on Naoya in 2020, won't say no to any challenge. Takuma vs. Moloney would be a matchup of contenders rated in the top 10s of The Ring, WBC, IBF and WBO.

Flyweight – Recently crowned women's WBC titleholder Marlen Esparza is rated No. 1 by The Ring and BoxRec.com, but there's one loss on the 2012 Olympic bronze medalist's pro ledger – a bloody technical decision to Seniesa Estrada in 2019. A rematch – and a natural high-profile grudge match to make, as both are promoted by Golden Boy – gives Esparza an opportunity to avenge her loss and Estrada the opportunity to become a three-division titleholder.

Those are my suggestions. I'm not going to hold my breath for any of these matchups, but a boxing nerd can dream, can't he?

Before I wrap up, I'd like to end on a positive note by pointing out that one of the top-five fights I wanted to see in 2022 – the Juan Francisco Estrada-Roman Gonzalez rubber match – is set for March 5 in San Diego (and you know I'll be there, front and center).

As we went to press, the following fights were close to being finalized for the months of March, April and May, and were just awaiting official announcements: Jermell Charlo vs. Brian Castano II, Inoue vs. Donaire II, Joshua vs. Usyk II, Spence vs. Yordenis Ugas, Katie Taylor vs. Amanda Serrano, Oscar Valdez vs. Shakur Stevenson, and Gennadiy Golovkin vs. Ryota Murata.

Sometimes dreams come true in boxing.

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

BY TOM GRAY

Martin displayed timing and power against Romero Duno.

RYAN HAFEY

FRANK MARTIN

There is yet another potential star at 135 pounds.

Known as "The Ghost," the unbeaten Frank Martin was pretty much invisible through three rounds before scaring Filipino puncher Romero Duno out of his wits with a pair of sharp knockdowns that ended the scheduled 10-rounder in the fourth. It was the performance of the night on a New Year's Day card at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, Florida, which hosted the heavyweight clash between Luis Ortiz and Charles Martin in the main event.

Martin (15-0, 11 knockouts) hails from Detroit and now resides in Indianapolis. A national amateur champion in 2016, this classy southpaw turned pro the following year and has added layers to his game while racking up the victories. There was a noticeable improvement in opposition in 2021, and Martin responded accordingly with dominant displays against 13-0 Jerry Perez (KO 7) and 30-5 Ryan Kielczweski (UD 10). He didn't lose a single round against either opponent.

Duno (24-3, 19 KOs) is no world-beater, but he was a known commodity who carries some pop. There was little doubt that Martin would win, but the super-confident 27-year-old was determined to do more than that – he wanted to make a statement on a high-profile card. It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.

The touted prospect was careful but calculating in the early going and – once he had his opponent figured out – closed the show in style. In Round 4, Martin drew a right hand from Duno, pulled back and countered with an explosive left hand to the chin for the first knockdown. The visitor did very well to find his feet, but the gulf in class was now obvious. The action resumed, and again Martin probed with his southpaw jab, again Duno released the right, and again he was dropped hard with a powerful left-hand counter shot. This time, there was no recovery.

It's early days, but time will tell if we should believe in The Ghost.

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NEW FACES: BRIAN NORMAN JR.

By **Anson Wainwright**

AGE: 21
HOMETOWN: Atlanta, Georgia
WEIGHT CLASS: junior welterweight
HEIGHT/REACH: 5-foot-8 (173 cm)/72 inches (183 cm)
AMATEUR RECORD: 140-22 (roughly)
TURNED PRO: 2018
PRO RECORD: 22-0 (19 knockouts)
TRAINER: Brian Norman Sr.
MANAGER: Joe Dunkin
PROMOTER: D&D Boxing
INSTAGRAM: officialb.norman

BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: "My favorite performance would have to be my fight with Demian Fernandez," Norman told The Ring, referring to a victory in his hometown last August. "It was a quick, first-round knockout, but it was supposed to be a step-up fight for me. I passed the test.

"That's the best I felt in any fight. Surprisingly, that's also the fight where I had one week to train because I was recovering from COVID."

WORST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: Norman is unenthusiastic about his seventh-round technical decision over Flavio Rodriguez in the co-feature to stablemate Brandun Lee's ShoBox headliner in March 2020.

"I didn't really stick to the game plan that fight," he admitted. "[I] was trying to rush a knockout, so it made the fight look ugly."

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: Norman was a talented amateur, amassing a handful of junior national titles in his 150-plus contests before turning professional at the tender age of 17.

Although he is based in Atlanta, far away from the training camp hotbeds around the U.S., he has managed to get some good sparring with more seasoned (and heavier) professionals Money Powell IV, Justin DeLoach and Charles Conwell.

He enjoyed a now-notorious dogfight with Gervonta Davis last February.

"The first time, we did four rounds then cut off the bell and went for about 20-plus minutes," said Norman. "The second time, we did about 20 rounds. It was just tough 'cause of how long it was."

Recently he got some high-class sparring with pound-for-pound star Terence Crawford and rising welterweight force and stablemate Jaron Ennis.

"They were both doing four-minute rounds, but me and Boots [Ennis] probably did about 18 rounds in total, and I only did three with Bud [Crawford]," explained Norman. "It was a very great experience with both. With me being so young and hanging with the top guys, it is a very big confidence boost. Also, working with top guys, you learn a lot. It's really the small things, like being ready at all times. Small tricks. Changing your posture, et cetera."

Norman was discovered by D&D Boxing's Cameron Dunkin, who is renowned for his ability to find new talent.

"I saw a film of the junior nationals that he won in Dallas, and I thought he was absolutely sensational," said Dunkin. "He looked like a Roy Jones type of guy. He had tremendous power with the left hook – a little bit with the right, but his left hook was startling. He has so much skill and defense, he was just dominating people."

Former Ring editor-in-chief Steve Farhood, who now serves as an on-air analyst for ShoBox, has seen Norman fight live twice and likes what he sees.

"Norman is an intriguing prospect," said Farhood. "I remember covering his father's fights (Brian Sr. fought as a super middleweight until 2011), and because of that early influence, Norman learned a lot at an early age. He attended one of his father's fights at age 2, started boxing at 7 and sparred with Gervonta Davis at 16.

"Norman is barely out of his teen years, but he already has his man-strength."

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: Farhood feels that although Norman has been very active, fighting 22 times since turning professional four years ago, quantity isn't everything.

"The quality of opposition hasn't been very high," said Farhood. "He's fought 13 times in Mexico, with 12 of those opponents having had losing records [and the one with a winning record ended in a no-contest]. But he was impressive in stopping the durable Benjamin Whitaker [in March 2021]. That was a subtle step up."

Norman knows he needs to improve in all aspects of his game to reach the upper echelon of the sport.

"I need to keep doing what I'm doing," he said. "I'm very focused. I'm working hard. Keep doing what I'm doing but at a higher rate."

STORYLINES: "I didn't come from the hood or anything; I was very comfortable. I never really struggled," Norman said of his formative years in Atlanta. "My dad made sure we ate; he made sure we went to school on time."

His father, who notably went the distance with future light heavyweight champ Jean Pascal in 2007, retired with a 17-11 (5 KOs) record. Brian Jr. decided he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps when he was 7 years old.

"My father had his last fight, and I said, 'Can I start fighting?' He asked if I'm sure; it's very dangerous. And either that night or the next night, he started working with me."

Norman hasn't looked back since.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright

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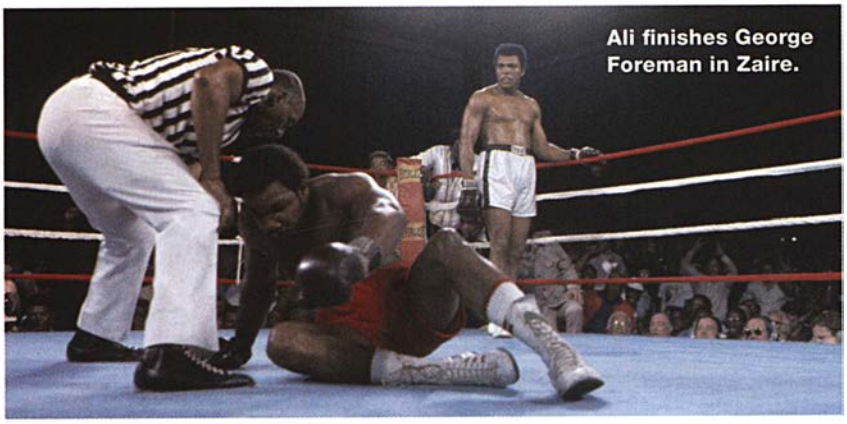
JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

Muhammad Ali gave new meaning to the term WORLD champion. During the course of his extraordinary ring career, he fought in 12 different countries and 12 states within the United States. The only continents that he didn't fight in were South America, Australia and Antarctica. He also had one fight in Puerto Rico, which is a commonwealth of the United States.

The geographic breakdown for Ali's 61 professional fights is:



Ali finishes George Foreman in Zaire.

COUNTRIES	
United States	45
England	3
Canada	2
Germany	2
Switzerland	1
Japan	1
Ireland	1
Indonesia	1
Zaire	1
Malaysia	1
Philippines	1
Bahamas	1

COMMONWEALTHS	
Puerto Rico	1

STATES	
New York	10
Nevada	8
Florida	6
Kentucky	5
California	5
Texas	4
Maryland	2
Pennsylvania	1
Maine	1
Georgia	1
Ohio	1
Louisiana	1

That's quite an itinerary.

★ ★ ★

I've written in the past about a reader named John who emails me on a regular basis. His comments are often thought-provoking and cut to the core of boxing. Some of the recent thoughts that he has shared with me are:

* "Too much money, too much greed, and a long list of other 'too muches' have turned the fight game into what we have today. Years ago was not my imagination. It was not because I was young or knew nothing about fights. There was a raw power to it all. I've lowered my expectations now. I'm just looking for a good fight. I try and catch a few guys who are not the best, don't have the skills that the big names have, but they have heart."

* "Let me clear something up. I worked most of my life in heavy construction. I saw men die on the job site. I saw men lose their legs, arms, and eyesight. I know a police officer who walked into a housing project and was hit with several bullets. So I pause when I hear that no one takes the risks that a boxer takes and no one sacrifices as much as a fighter does. There are lots of risk-takers out there doing it to make a decent living and get a better life for their families and themselves. That's not meant to demean the risks in boxing, just to put them in perspective a bit."

* If you lose the passion for the fight game, it's over. I see it all the time. Fighters just going through the motions. When it becomes a checklist, it's time to check out. Don't try to figure it out. Just move on. It's over."

* "Boxing talk is becoming all about outside the ring, not what's happening in it. It's ninety-nine percent, not about skill, not about development, just speculation about boxers and who they

should fight and what should have happened but didn't."

* "I've been reading about all these big purses for fighters. Money is not about how high you can count. For some of us, it's about survival. Some people don't know what it's like to have a car repair bill that causes you to lose twelve pounds in ten days and have to work overtime in a place you don't want to be at. I get real life in my life every day."

* "I don't like celebrity boxing. There's a fake feel to it. And there's another reason I don't like it. If you've been in the ring all your life, it's dangerous enough. But when you've been outside the ring and walk in, it can be bad, very bad. You always think it won't be me. But numbers don't lie."

* "I never hit a person with a concern for their health unless it was to damage it. It's the way of a fighter. Nothing personal, but I'm going to hurt you within the rules of the game."

* "Everyone should get excited about boxing at least once in their life."

★★★

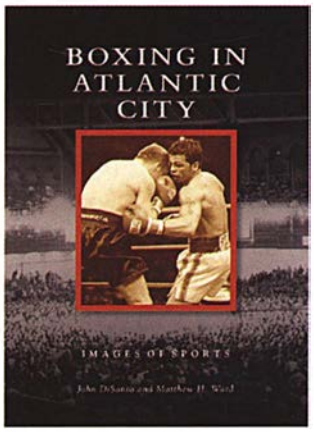
Arcadia Publishing specializes in pictorial books keyed to local and regional history and releases approximately 900 new titles each year. Its standard publishing format is to insert 180 to 240 small black-and-white photos in a 128-page book accompanied by a bare bones text. Utilizing this formula, it has published books about boxing in Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Boston, Cleveland, New York City, Upstate New York, Oregon, Connecticut and Atlantic City.

I decided to sample Arcadia's boxing books and settled on *Boxing in Atlantic City* (written by John DiSanto and Matthew H. Ward). There's a nice photo at the beginning that shows Joe Louis relaxing on a beach in Atlantic City surrounded by admirers.

"This section of the beach," the caption explains, "located near Missouri Avenue, was a segregated African American area until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Because beachgoers brought baskets of fried chicken with them to the beach, the strip became known as 'Chicken Bone Beach.'"

If only the rest of the book were that interesting.

The book divides boxing in Atlantic City into six periods labeled Beginning (1865-1963), Rebirth (1964-1979), Boom (1980-1985), Zenith (1986-1989), Sustaining (1990-1999) and Decline (2000-2020). It's image-driven. But most of the photos (of fighters, non-combatants, club cards and milestone bouts) are ordinary, and some of the more interesting photos are the smallest in size. The text consists largely of photo captions. There's no narrative flow and also no index, so it's difficult to know if (and on what page) a given fighter is included in the book.



That said, there are some interesting nuggets of information in the captions. To wit:

* Ring announcer Ed Derian began his career behind the microphone at roller derby competitions in Philadelphia.

* The first world title fight held in Atlantic City was Dick Tiger vs. Joey Giardello at Convention Hall on December 7 in 1963.

* The first fight card held at a casino in Atlantic City featured Howard Davis Jr. vs. Luis Davila at Resorts International on November 4, 1978.

* There were only 25 fight cards in Atlantic City in the entire 1970s. Then casino boxing took hold. In 1982 alone, there were 140 fight cards in AC. But boxing in Atlantic City faltered badly once the new millennium began – only 120 shows in the entire first decade of the 21st century and 100 in the second.

★★★

Things You'll Never Hear in the Media Center Before a Big Fight

"There's no need for a written contract," Teofimo Lopez told reporters. "Ryan Kavanaugh gave me his word that the deal is one hundred percent solid."

"My wife and I asked Adrien Broner to babysit for our children."

"I just made a new will and named Don King as the executor of my estate."

"I was impressed by how calmly Lou DiBella defused the crisis," Eddie Hearn said.

"If this goes wrong, Al Haymon won't be able to show his face around here." RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Broken Dreams: Inside Another Year Inside Boxing – was just published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for boxing's highest honor — induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

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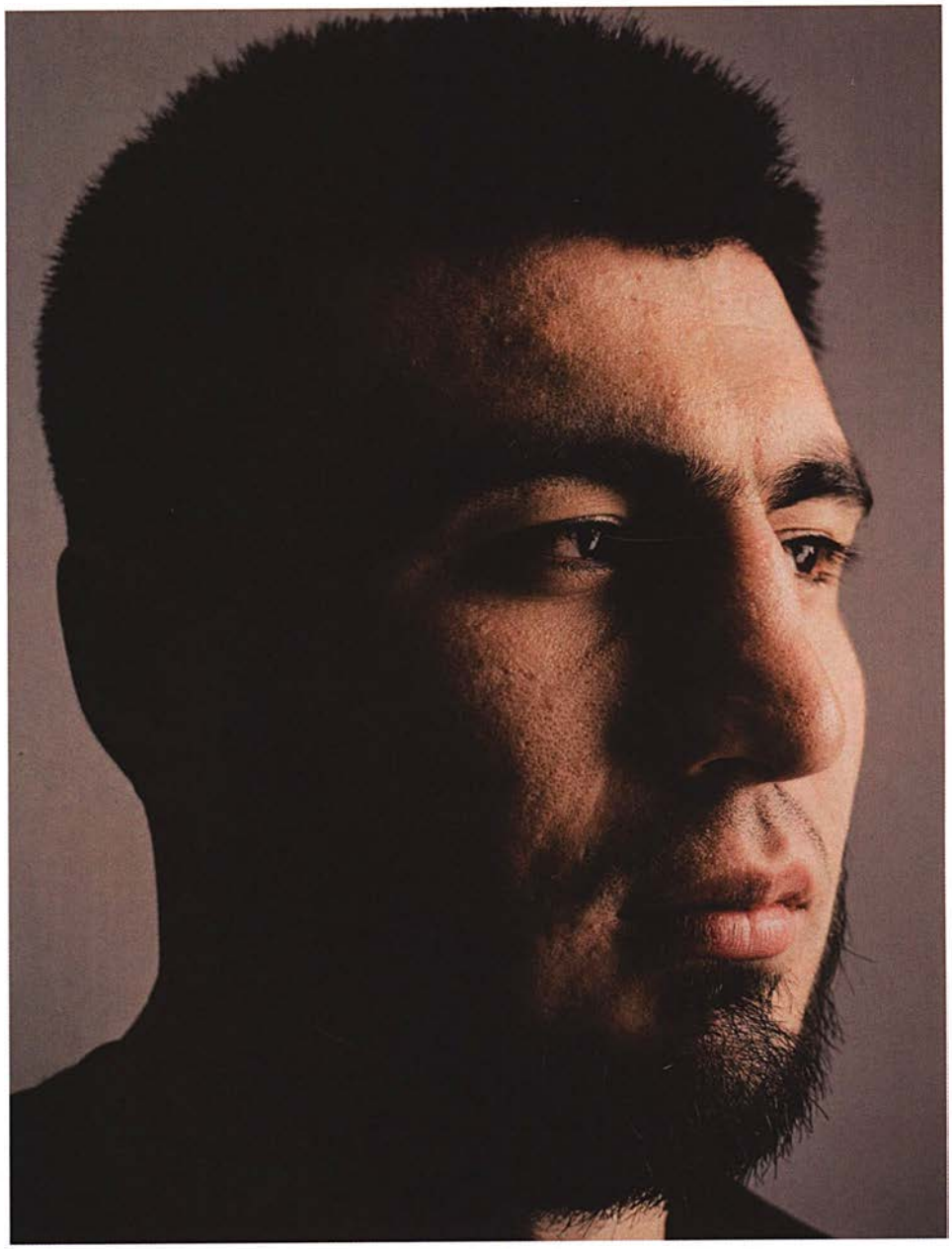
BAKHODIR JALOLOV AND OLYMPIC GOLD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK** • TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**



THE FACE OF BOXING

Olympic gold medals in the heavyweight division were foundation stones for Joe Frazier (1964) and George Foreman (1968) in their respective ring careers. In 1984, as athletes got bigger, the Olympic boxing super-heavyweight division was created. Gold medals at that level served as launching pads for Lennox Lewis (1988), Wladimir Klitschko (1996), and Anthony Joshua (2012). Now 27-year-old Bakhodir Jalolov of Uzbekistan will try to turn

Olympic super-heavyweight gold into hard cash.

Jalolov is 6-feet-6 inches tall and fights in the neighborhood of 250 pounds. Prior to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, his resume included a gold medal at the 2019 World Championships. Revised amateur rules allowed him to compete in Tokyo despite having had seven fights as a pro and winning each of these fights by knockout.

Wojtek Urbanek photographed Jalolov twice. The first time was at the weigh-in one day before Bakhodir's April 10, 2019, fight against Brendan Barrett at Sony Hall in New York. The second was at the fight itself when Jalolov manhandled Barrett with ease (photos below) and knocked him out in the first round.

"When I photographed Jalolov at the weigh-in," Urbanek remembers, "I felt strength. He was like a giant rock. It was almost like photographing nature. Some fighters perform for the camera. Jalolov was polite but he didn't care. Then at the fight, even though I was watching through my camera, I remember hearing what was happening as much as seeing it. The other guy had no chance. He was like a ball being battered around. The sounds of the punches landing that night are still in my mind."

In Tokyo, Jalolov won his first three bouts before squaring off in the gold-medal contest against Richard Torrez of the United States. The fight was a rematch of their 2019 encounter at the World Championships, when Jalolov knocked Torrez unconscious in the first round and Torrez was carried from the ring on a stretcher as a precautionary measure. At the Olympics, Torrez stayed on his feet. But Jalolov prevailed on a unanimous verdict.

"When I heard that Jalolov was fighting for the gold medal, I thought it was pretty cool," Urbanek recalls. "And I thought back to the day I photographed him at the weigh-in. It was in a room where a bunch of people were taking a written test so they could get their driver's license from the Department of Motor Vehicles. The athletic commission wasn't allowed to come in and set up for the weigh-in until the tests were done, so everything was an hour late. Jalolov and everyone else had to sit around for hours. And now I was watching this same man fight for an Olympic gold medal on a gigantic worldwide stage. Life takes strange turns." RING

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.

RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of Jan. 15, 2022

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS BY BRIAN HARTY

Joseph Parker was an improved fighter in his second win over Derek Chisora.

HEAVYWEIGHT: Joseph Parker's rematch with Derek Chisora had a big-time boxing feel that was absent in their first encounter back in the bubbled days of May (won via split decision by Parker), and the chanting fans at Manchester Arena got a good show, even if their man took the loss. Three times Chisora received a count from the ref, but the 38-year-old did justice to his "War" moniker in absorbing the onslaught of uppercuts from the New Zealander and battling until the final bell – whereupon Parker won a unanimous decision that was closer than it should've been. Still, the Ratings Panel felt the Kiwi needed to make a bigger statement in order to hop over No. 4-rated Dillian Whyte on the list, so Parker stayed put at No. 5.

Two weeks later, a heavyweight extravaganza in Florida – a card with a combined weigh-in value of 4,642¼ pounds – featured Luis Ortiz (No. 7) and Frank Sanchez (No. 10) taking on Charles Martin and Christian Hammer, respectively. Sanchez won all 10 rounds plus a point for a knockdown, while the lumbering Ortiz went to the canvas twice but rekindled his mojo in a huge way in the sixth round, hitting Martin with a left hand so hard that the 6-foot-5 American just stood in place for a moment, hands down, like a lost child. It was over soon after that. Both winners held onto their rankings.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: Despite the bloody windshield he had to deal with after a nasty head clash in Round 4, Artur Beterbiev (No. 1) put a laser-focused beating on Marcus Browne (No. 5 at the time) – particularly the American's torso – which ended with a ninth-round knockout for the Russian, who retained his IBF/WBC titles and improved his record to 17-0 (17 KOs). It was yet another performance that prompted "pound-for-pound" whispers on the panel.

The following night, Gilberto Ramirez (No. 7 last month) scored his 43rd victory with a 10th-round stoppage of Yunieski Gonzalez (unrated), stunning the Cuban with a short right to the chin and finishing the show with a hail storm on the ropes. With the fight being a WBA eliminator, "Zurdo" is now poised to challenge undefeated Russian Dmitry Bivol.

Eleider Alvarez (No. 4 last month) hasn't fought since August 2020, so he was removed. That along with the fights mentioned above resulted in a promotion to No. 5 for Ramirez, a drop to No. 7 for Browne and the debut of France's Mathieu Bauderlique at No. 10.

A week later, Maxim Vlasov held the No. 4 spot with a unanimous decision over Felix Valera (unrated) in Russia.

Finally, on January 15, obscure Floridian Steve Geffrard stepped in on a week's notice to face WBO titleholder Joe Smith Jr. after Smith's original opponent, Callum Johnson, tested positive for COVID. It was a noble effort, but Geffrard was overwhelmed and knocked out in the ninth round by the No. 3-rated New Yorker.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Previously unheralded Englishman Lerrone Richards gave his best performance to date, boxing his way to a No. 10 rating by upsetting Carlos Gongora, who exited the list from his No. 9 position. One panelist gave a shout-out to David Morrell, suggesting that the Cuban's December 18 stoppage of Alantez Fox and 2020 victory over Lennox Allen carried more weight than Richards' accomplishment, but the majority supported "the man who beat the man."

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Israil Madrimov officially secured a ninth-round stoppage victory and a promotion from No. 10 to No.

9 in the ratings, but not without controversy. His fight against Michel Soro (unrated) ended when the referee stepped in to call the TKO but apparently was unaware that the bell had already rung, thus allowing Madrimov, who was fighting in his home country of Uzbekistan, to land several punches that shouldn't have been thrown. At press time, the WBA was under fire to order a rematch.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: Former WBC titleholder Viktor Postol (No. 4 last month) hasn't been in the ring since his narrow loss to Jose Ramirez in August 2020, so the veteran Ukrainian was removed and Spain's Sandor Martin filled the void at No. 10.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Division champ Naoya Inoue protected his belt collection at the expense of overmatched Thai fighter Aran Dipaen, who was last seen being tossed halfway across the ring by a left hook in the eighth round. No movement in the ratings.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: After Andrew Moloney's ill-fated "trilogy" (he lost the first and third fights and the middle one ended in a no-contest after a controversial head-clash ruling) with Joshua Franco, the Australian returned to the green column (and his homeland) with a unanimous decision win over tough Filipino Froilan Saludar, a fight that steadily turned from boxing match to public flogging. It's almost like Moloney had some frustration to get out.

Francisco Rodriguez Jr. (No. 7) bounced back from his September loss to WBO titleholder Kazuto Ioka (No. 3) with a seventh-round stoppage of fellow Mexican Arnulfo Salvador (unrated).

STRAWWEIGHT: Rated No. 1 at both 105 pounds and on the list of names we love to tell our friends who don't follow boxing, Knockout CP Freshmart defended his WBA title with a fifth-round stoppage of Robert Paradero (unrated) in Thailand. That same Tuesday in Japan, Masataka Taniguchi (No. 8 last month) ripped the WBO belt and No. 4 ranking from Wilfredo Mendez with an 11th-round TKO. Mendez fell to No. 6.

On December 21, No. 5-rated Vic Saludar (Froilan's younger brother) suffered a split-decision loss to the unrated Erick Rosa, a relative novice from the Dominican Republic. There was some iffy officiating in favor of Rosa (the fight took place in his hometown), but the general sentiment on the panel was that it didn't qualify as an outright robbery, so Rosa came in at No. 8 and Saludar dropped just below him to No. 9. The shift pushed Yudai Shigeoka (No. 10) off the list.

P4P

1. **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 57-1-2 (39 KOs)
2. **OLEKSANDR USYK** — Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** — U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
4. **NAOYA INOUE** — Japan • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
5. **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
6. **ERROL SPENCE JR.** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
7. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** — Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
8. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** — Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
9. **KAZUTO IOKA** — Japan • 28-2-0 (15 KOs)
10. **TYSON FURY** — U.K. • 31-0-1 (22 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC — U.K. • 31-0-1 (22 KOs)
- 1 **OLEKSANDR USYK** IBF, WBA, WBO — Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 2 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** — U.K. • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 3 **DEONTAY WILDER** — U.S. • 42-2-1 (41 KOs)
- 4 **DILLIAN WHYTE** — U.K. • 28-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 5 **JOSEPH PARKER** — New Zealand • 30-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 6 **ANDY RUIZ JR.** — U.S. • 34-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 7 **LUIS ORTIZ** — Cuba • 33-2-0 (28 KOs)
- 8 **JOE JOYCE** — U.K. • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 9 **FILIP HRGOVIC** — Croatia • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 10 **FRANK SANCHEZ** — Cuba • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF — Latvia • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
- 1 **YUNIEL DORTICOS** — Cuba • 25-2-0 (23 KOs)
- 2 **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC — Congo • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)
- 3 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE** WBO — U.K. • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 4 **THABISO MCHUNU** — S. Africa • 23-5-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **KEVIN LERENA** — S. Africa • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** — Poland • 31-3-0 (19 KOs)
- 7 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** — Russia • 13-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 8 **MICHAL CIESLAK** — Poland • 21-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 9 **MATEUSZ MASTERNAK** — Poland • 46-5-0 (31 KOs)
- 10 **RYAD MERHY** — Belgium • 30-1-0 (25 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC — Russia • 17-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 2 **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA — Russia • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **JOE SMITH JR.** WBO — U.S. • 28-3-0 (22 KOs)
- 4 **MAXIM VLASOV** — Russia • 46-4-0 (26 KOs)
- 5 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** — Mexico • 43-0-0 (29 KOs)
- 6 **CALLUM SMITH** — U.K. • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
- 7 **MARCUS BROWNE** — U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **ANTHONY YARDE** — U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 9 **JOSHUA BUATSI** — U.K. • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 10 **MATHIEU BAUDERLIQUE** — France • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO — Mexico • 57-1-2 (39 KOs)
- 1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** — U.S. • 25-0-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **CALEB PLANT** — U.S. • 21-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** — U.K. • 30-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 4 **ANTHONY DIRRELL** — U.S. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)
- 5 **JOHN RYDER** — U.K. • 30-5-0 (17 KOs)
- 6 **DAVID LEMIEUX** — Canada • 43-4-0 (36 KOs)
- 7 **FEDOR CHUDINOV** — Russia • 25-2-1 (17 KOs)
- 8 **CHRISTIAN MBILLI** — France • 20-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 9 **ZACH PARKER** — U.K. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
- 10 **LERRONE RICHARDS** — U.K. • 16-0-0 (3 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Jan. 15, 2022

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kazakhstan • 41-1-1 (36 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 31-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 38-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA** WBA
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **7** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 31-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **8** **CARLOS ADAMES**
  Dom. Rep. • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **LIAM WILLIAMS**
  U.K. • 23-3-1 (18 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 34-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **1** **BRIAN CASTANO** WBO
  Argentina • 17-0-2 (12 KOs)
- **2** **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 28-3-3 (16 KOs)
- **4** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **5** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 18-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **7** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (21 KOs)
- **8** **MAGOMED KURBANOV**
  Russia • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **ISRAIL MADRIMOV**
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **10** **LIAM SMITH**
  U.K. • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 38-0-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **YORDENIS UGAS** WBA
  Cuba • 27-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **JARON ENNIS**
  U.S. • 28-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **5** **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
  Lithuania • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **7** **DAVID AVANESYAN**
  Russia • 28-3-1 (16 KOs)
- **8** **RADZHAB BUTAEV**
  Russia • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **CONOR BENN**
  U.K. • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **10** **CODY CROWLEY**
  Canada • 20-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **JOSE RAMIREZ**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 35-2-0 (27 KOs)
- **4** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
  Puerto Rico • 17-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **6** **MARIO BARRIOS**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **7** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 21-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **8** **BATYR AKHMEDOV**
  Russia • 9-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **9** **JOSE PEDRAZA**
  Puerto Rico • 29-3-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **SANDOR MARTIN**
  Spain • 39-2-0 (13 KOs)

Cuban veteran Luis Ortiz (right) retained a No. 7 spot at heavyweight after getting off the floor twice to knock out Charles Martin.

Younger Cuban heavyweight Frank Sanchez dominated and outpointed late replacement Christian Hammer to remain at No. 10 in the ratings.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.** RING, IBF, WBA, WBO
  Australia • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
  U.S. • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **2** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **3** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **GERVONTA DAVIS**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **5** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 22-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **7** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 32-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **8** **JORGE LINARES**
  Venezuela • 47-6-0 (29 KOs)
- **9** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-4-0 (27 KOs)
- **10** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 36-3-1 (25 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

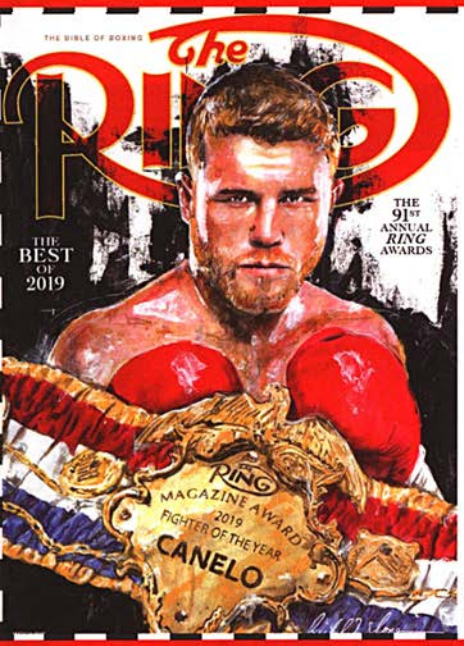
- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **SHAKUR STEVENSON** WBO
  U.S. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **MIGUEL BERCHELT**
  Mexico • 38-2-0 (34 KOs)
- **3** **JAMEL HERRING**
  U.S. • 23-3-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 16-0-1 (13 KOs)
- **5** **CHRIS COLBERT**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **ROGER GUTIERREZ**
  Venezuela • 26-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **7** **KENICHI OGAWA** IBF
  Japan • 26-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **8** **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
  U.S. • 18-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **XAVIER MARTINEZ**
  U.S. • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **ROBSON CONCEICAO**
  Brazil • 16-1-0 (8 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 35-1-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 23-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **3** **JOSH WARRINGTON**
  U.K. • 30-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **4** **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **KIKO MARTINEZ** IBF
  Spain • 43-10-2 (30 KOs)
- **6** **LEIGH WOOD**
  U.K. • 25-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **7** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 28-2-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
  Mongolia • 12-2-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **XU CAN**
  China • 18-3-0 (3 KOs)
- **10** **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **STEPHEN FULTON** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **3** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 29-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **4** **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 22-1-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **RA'EESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **8** **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **MARLON TAPALES**
  Phil. • 35-3-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **RYOSUKE IWASA**
  Japan • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)



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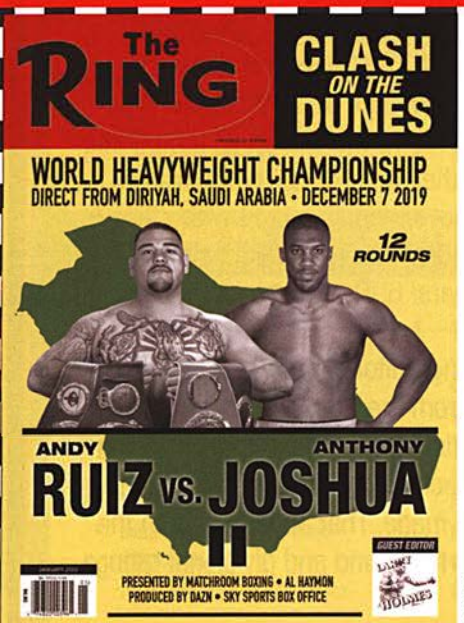

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RATINGS

Through fights of Jan. 15, 2022

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE** WBC
  Phil. • 42-6-0 (28 KOs)
- **2** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
  Phil. • 31-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 19-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **NORDINE OUBAALI**
  France • 17-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 15-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **7** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  Cuba • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
  U.S. • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **9** **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **LEE MCGREGOR**
  U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBA, WBC
  Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 50-5-1 (43 KOs)
- **2** **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
  Nicaragua • 50-3-0 (41 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 28-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
  Phil. • 33-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **5** **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 18-1-2 (8 KOs)
- **6** **CARLOS CUADRAS**
  Mexico • 39-4-1 (27 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 35-5-1 (25 KOs)
- **8** **DONNIE NIETES**
  Phil. • 43-1-6 (23 KOs)
- **9** **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 22-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **PEDRO GUEVARA**
  Mexico • 38-3-1 (22 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 18-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **2** **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **SUNNY EDWARDS** IBF
  U.K. • 17-0-0 (4 KOs)
- **4** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **RICARDO SANDOVAL**
  U.S. • 20-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6** **MORUTI MTHALANE**
  S. Africa • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **7** **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 31-5-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
  Puerto Rico • 21-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **JACKSON CHAUKE**
  S. Africa • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **10** **RYOTA YAMAUCHI**
  Japan • 8-1-0 (7 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
- **2** **MASAMICHI YABUKI** WBC
  Japan • 13-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **KENSHIRO TERAJI**
  Japan • 18-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **4** **JONATHAN GONZALEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 25-3-1 (14 KOs)
- **5** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
  U.S. • 14-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **ELWIN SOTO**
  Mexico • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 33-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
  Argentina • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **9** **ESTEBAN BERMUDEZ**
  Mexico • 14-3-2 (10 KOs)
- **10** **DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 12-0-2 (6 KOs)

Joe Smith Jr. (right) held onto the No. 3 spot at 175 pounds after scoring a knockout of late-sub Steve Geffrard.

No. 1 at 175 pounds, Artur Beterbiev (right), was at his ruthless best in stopping Marcus Browne, who dropped from No. 5 to No. 8.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2** **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 37-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 55-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **4** **MASATAKA TANIGUCHI** WBO
  Japan • 15-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **WILFREDO MENDEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
- **6** **RENE MARK CUARTO** IBF
  Phil. • 19-2-2 (11 KOs)
- **7** **PEDRO TADURAN**
  Phil. • 14-3-1 (11 KOs)
- **8** **ERICK ROSA**
  Dom. Rep. • 5-0-0 (1 KO)
- **9** **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 21-5-0 (11 KOs)
- **10** **GINJIRO SHIGEOKA**
  Japan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of Jan. 15, 2022

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 20-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 42-1-1 (30 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 11-2-0 (4 KOs)

5 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)

6 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)

7 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 16-0-0 (5 KOs)

8 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)

9 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)

10 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-0-1 (11 KOs)
4 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 27-1-0 (13 KOs)
5 **SHADASIA GREEN**
U.S. • 8-0-0 (7 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 27-1-0 (13 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-0-1 (11 KOs)
4 **FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 12-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **RAQUEL MILLER**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (4 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, WBO
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE**
Canada • 18-1-0 (1 KO)
2 **PATRICIA BERGHULT** WBC
Sweden • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
3 **HANNAH RANKIN** WBA
U.K. • 11-5-0 (2 KOs)
4 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)
5 **CYNTHIA LOZANO**
Mexico • 9-1-0 (7 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **JESSICA MCCASKILL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 11-2-0 (4 KOs)
1 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 44-13-5 (11 KOs)
3 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 22-6-0 (0 KOs)
4 **LOLITA MUZEYA**
Zambia • 16-1-0 (8 KOs)
5 **EWA PIATKOWSKA**
Poland • 16-1-0 (4 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **CHANTELLE CAMERON** RING, IBF, WBC
U.K. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-5-0 (10 KOs)
2 **KALI REIS** WBA, WBO
U.S. • 19-7-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MARY MCGEE**
U.S. • 27-4-0 (15 KOs)
4 **ANAHI SANCHEZ**
Argentina • 20-5-0 (12 KOs)
5 **JESSICA CAMARA**
Canada • 8-3-0 (0 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
Ireland • 20-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)
2 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 42-1-1 (30 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 9-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **NATASHA JONAS**
U.K. • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)
5 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 14-2-0 (5 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **MIKAELA MAYER** RING, IBF, WBO
U.S. • 16-0-0 (5 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 46-3-0 (19 KOs)
2 **ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** WBC
U.S. • 11-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE**
France • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
5 **TERRI HARPER**
U.K. • 11-1-1 (6 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 42-1-1 (30 KOs)
2 **ERIKA CRUZ HERNANDEZ** WBA
Mexico • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 41-11-2 (19 KOs)
5 **ELINA TISSEN**
Germany • 25-2-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 39-4-4 (16 KOs)
2 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 17-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE**
France • 15-0-0 (1 KO)
4 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
Mexico • 18-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-11-4 (19 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 17-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 22-3-1 (4 KOs)
3 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-11-4 (19 KOs)
4 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 53-4-2 (30 KOs)
5 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 16-5-1 (0 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 33-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 20-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 32-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 24-4-1 (4 KOs)
5 **ADELAIDA RUIZ**
U.S. • 10-0-1 (5 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 11-1-0 (1 KOs) WBC
2 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 19-2-1 (7 KOs)
3 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 30-3-2 (10 KOs)
4 **IBETH ZAMORA**
Mexico • 32-7-0 (12 KOs)
5 **JESSICA NERY PLATA**
Mexico • 27-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBO
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 14-0-1 (4 KOs)
3 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 14-0-0 (2 KOs)
4 **TSUNAMI TENKAI**
Japan • 28-13-1 (16 KOs)
5 **YESICA BOPP**
Argentina • 37-2-0 (17 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBA
U.S. • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 11-0-1 (3 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 23-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ANABEL ORTIZ**
Mexico • 31-5-0 (4 KOs)
5 **THI THU NHI NGUYEN** WBO
Vietnam • 5-0-0 (1 KO)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 17-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 18-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
4 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 4-0-1 (1 KO)
5 **YENIFER LEON**
Venezuela • 13-4-0 (9 KOs)

DIVISION-BY-DIVISION, THE RING IMAGINES 17 PERFECT FIGHT CARDS TO MAKE 2022 A YEAR TO CELEBRATE

BY THE RING STAFF

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WHEN IT COMES TO BOXING IN 2022, ONE COULD BE FORGIVEN FOR HOPING FOR THE BEST BUT EXPECTING THE WORST. »

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FURY: AL BELLO; USYK: DYLAN BUELL; GOLOVKIN: ERICK RASCO

Clockwise from top-left: Joshua-Usyk, Fury-Wilder 3, Lopez-Kambosos Jr. and Estrada-Gonzalez 2 all electrified the boxing world in 2021.

The modern era has always accepted dueling promoters, rival broadcasters, mandatory insanity, unwelcome rematch clauses and a percentage of so-called superfights being cremated as opposed to marinated. However, a global pandemic has further compounded these issues, and the amount of low blows the sport has been forced to endure has gone up alarmingly.

We have bouts frequently postponed due to fighters testing positive for COVID-19 (Jessie Vargas vs. Liam Smith being the latest). Fights are still taking place way too late (see Amir Khan vs. Kell Brook). Certain elite-level fights are not taking place at all (see Errol Spence Jr. vs. Terence Crawford). Dregs-level fights are grabbing the headlines (see Jake Paul vs. everyone he's boxed so far).

What a time to be a hardcore fight fan, you say?

But let's play fair. Too often we focus on the negatives in boxing and ignore what the sweet science has blessed us with. In 2021, the sport crowned three new undisputed champions in Claressa Shields (154), Josh Taylor (140) and Canelo Alvarez (168). At heavyweight, Oleksandr Usyk boxed beautifully to dethrone Anthony Joshua before a crowd of 67,000 fans outdoors in London, and the Tyson Fury-Deontay Wilder trilogy match was a never-to-be-forgotten classic. The smaller men also dazzled, with Juan Francisco Estrada and Roman Gonzalez putting forth a sequel for the ages, and George Kambosos Jr. produced a spectacular upset win over Teofimo Lopez.

Given what the world – and the boxing world – has endured over the last couple of years, that's a very impressive list of highlights, and there's plenty to look forward to at the elite level in 2022.

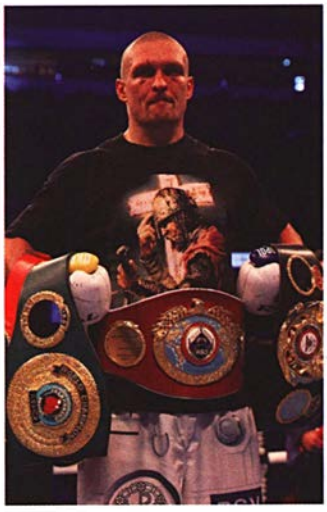
However, fight fans are greedy and they always want more, and we're no different. So that's what we're going to do in the following pages: tell you what we want in 2022.

What if we could make the perfect fight card in all 17 divisions? Three super-attractive matchups, all happening on the same night. What would that look like? And could these dreams actually come true? Some of the pairings are far-fetched and you'll have more chance of being kicked by a snake than seeing them, but we've included a "Feasibility Rating" to reflect the chances of them happening in the real world this year.

Be prepared to let your imagination wander. Dare to dream.

HEAVYWEIGHT By Tom Gray

TYSON FURY vs. OLEKSANDR USYK



MAIN EVENT

What a difference a year makes. In early 2021, Oleksandr Usyk was a pound-for-pound entrant due to his thorough domination of the cruiserweight ranks, but many felt his heavyweight ceiling was relatively low. The Ukrainian lefty was too small to compete in the glamour division and a direct hit from a much bigger man would spell doom. It turns out that Usyk (19-0, 13 KOs) knew something that most of us did not. An inspired 12-round unanimous decision win over Anthony Joshua in September earned him three world title belts and sent shockwaves through the boxing world, further bolstering the 34-year-old's reputation as one of the finest technicians in the sport. If Usyk is able to repeat that result against Joshua in the first third of 2022, then the biggest heavyweight bout available would be an undisputed title clash against another British colossus, Tyson Fury (31-0-1, 22 KOs). "The Gypsy King" is an entirely different proposition to Joshua and would start as the favorite, but Usyk has already confounded the critics once. Regardless of who you favor, this fight would be a money-spinning blockbuster in the U.K., Europe or the Middle East with both men throwing down for heavyweight history.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 60 PERCENT

CO-MAIN EVENT

ANTHONY JOSHUA vs. DEONTAY WILDER

Schedule this one for three rounds and there's still every chance that it won't go the distance. Forget rematch clauses and trilogy talk – we don't care. This irresistible collision only needs to happen once and it cannot fail to dazzle. Both men are capable of landing fight-ending shots at any time and both have been shaken up and floored on multiple occasions. Joshua (24-2, 22 KOs) is the bigger man and possesses the superior skillset, but Wilder's super-brave showing against Fury in their third encounter has many fans and experts convinced that he would outlast Joshua in a knock-down drag-out war. However, network affiliation and promotional allegiance is the stuff of nightmares in terms of getting this one over the line. Matchroom's Eddie Hearn, who represents Joshua, and Al Haymon, who advises Wilder (42-2-1, 41 KOs), remain incommunicado, and it would take a near-miracle to make this fight a reality. We're accustomed to such disappointments, but it would be a tragedy if the Joshua-Wilder cocktail is never mixed, because fight fans the world over would be queuing around the block to buy a round. We can but dream!

FEASIBILITY RATING: 5 PERCENT

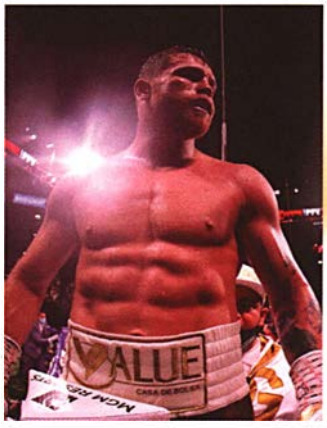
UNDERCARD

FILIP HRGOVIC vs. FRANK SANCHEZ

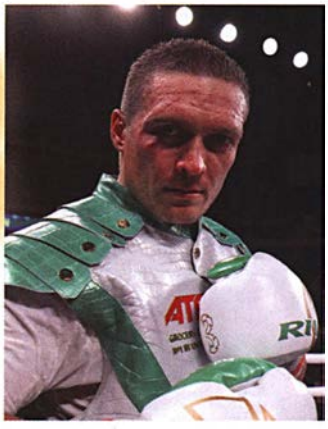
There are several attractive prospects and contenders making up the rear behind the big four listed above. Hrgovic and Sanchez have already secured Ring ratings, at Nos. 9 and 10 respectively, due to their dominant displays and fearsome reputations. Croatia's Hrgovic is unbeaten in 14 fights with 12 knockouts and is a serious danger man. The 29-year-old took a step up in class last year and produced a brace of impressive third-round stoppages over unbeaten opponents. Sanchez is also 29 and has posted 20 wins with 13 knockouts. Coached by 2021's Trainer of the Year, Eddy Reynoso, the Miami-based Cuban has grown from cruiserweight prospect to formidable 240-pound heavyweight contender. A matchup between the pair would tell us who's best, but it's more likely that they'll face off when the stakes are higher.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 30 PERCENT

CRUISERWEIGHT By Tom Gray



CANELO ALVAREZ vs. OLEKSANDR USYK



MAIN EVENT

OK, so there's more chance of Manny Pacquiao winning an Oscar, but let's take a look at this one anyway. While in New York late last year, Usyk spoke with assembled media and was asked about a potential 200-pound battle with Canelo Alvarez (57-1-2, 39 KOs). "I can move to cruiserweight," confirmed the Ukrainian wizard. "But one [condition] is that I keep my belts at heavyweight, fight him, then move back to heavyweight." Canelo-Usyk would be a financial – potentially record-setting – blockbuster between the two finest pound-for-pound fighters in the world today. No reigning super middleweight champ has ever faced a reigning heavyweight champ, so there's a better-than-tenuous link to when then-middleweight king Bob Fitzsimmons moved up to win the heavyweight title in 1897. Also, no reigning heavyweight champ has ever dropped back down for a superfight at cruiserweight. Despite Canelo being dwarfed, the intrigue is off the charts and it's the type of fight that would make the world stop. However, when Canelo's trainer, Eddy Reynoso, was asked by Lester Silva for his opinion, the acclaimed coach stomped on the fantasy fight without hesitation: "No, no way. There is no chance that [Canelo] will fight Usyk!" Size matters!

FEASIBILITY RATING: 2 PERCENT

CO-MAIN EVENT

MAIRIS BRIEDIS vs. LAWRENCE OKOLIE

Two very different fighters at very different stages of their careers. Mairis Briedis had to wait several years before he truly felt like king of the hill, and you can blame Mr. Usyk for that. Briedis (28-1, 20 KOs) surrendered his cherished WBC title to Usyk in 2018 and looked on in envy when his rival became undisputed champ six months later. However, when Usyk moved north to heavyweight, the 37-year-old Briedis quickly emerged as Ring and IBF champion. The hardened boxer-puncher from Latvia is coming off a low-key defense (TKO 3 Artur Mann), and despite being the No. 1 fighter in the division, he is in serious need of a significant challenge. Enter unbeaten Londoner Lawrence Okolie (17-0, 14 KOs). At 6-foot-5 with an 82-inch wingspan and a right hand endorsed by the devil himself, Okolie is hell on earth for any cruiserweight out there. He stopped former titleholder Krzysztof Glowacki in March of last year to win the vacant WBO title and blasted out the previously unbeaten Dilan Prasovic in his first defense. Currently scheduled to face Michal Cieslak on February 27, Okolie would welcome a Briedis clash, should all go well. Sauerland, which represents Briedis, and Matchroom Boxing, which deals on behalf of Okolie, are connected to different broadcasters, but they've done business many times. Fingers crossed!

FEASIBILITY RATING: 70 PERCENT

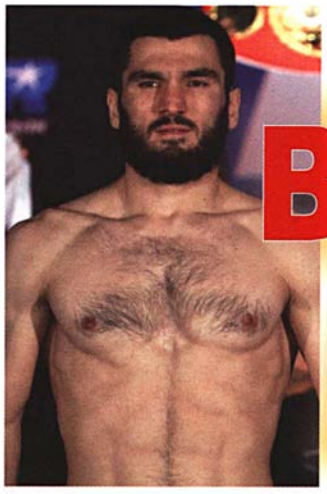
UNDERCARD

ILUNGA MAKABU vs. YUNIEL DORTICOS

WBC titleholder Ilunga Makabu looked like he'd won the lottery when Canelo stated in earnest that he would be willing to make the jump to cruiserweight and challenge for his belt. The pair attended a WBC convention in Mexico and it was smiles all around. Makabu was dreaming of life-changing money, Canelo was dreaming of a title in a fifth weight class, and WBC president Mauricio Sulaiman was dreaming of the attached sanctioning fees. Canelo, however, now looks poised to go in a different direction and, at least for now, talks have waned. Oh well! By the time you read this, Makabu should have dealt with mandatory challenger Thabiso Mchunu – a fighter he has beaten before – on January 29. If that's been the case – hell, even if he lost – how about a punch-up between the two fighters with the highest KO ratios in The Ring Top 10? Makabu has produced knockouts in 25 of his 28 wins (89 percent) and Dorticos has stopped 23 of 25 (92 percent). Promoter/network issues appear minimal. Why not? Bombs away!

FEASIBILITY RATING: 70 PERCENT

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT By Tom Gray



ARTUR BETERBIEV vs. CANELO ALVAREZ

MAIN EVENT

The reward for taking down Mexico's Canelo Alvarez is so high that there are "WANTED" posters in every boxing town from middleweight to heavyweight. Yes, gunning down the sport's most successful outlaw guarantees saddlebags full of cash and a reputation as the fastest draw in the territory. Usyk said he'd consider dropping down in weight for a shootout; Makabu was in the mix, and, as we go to press, 160-pound titlist Jermall Charlo has been linked to a super middleweight showdown against the undisputed champ. In the middle, however, is a fearsome and unbeaten Russian armed with a pair of 175-pound title belts. Artur Beterbiev (17-0, 17 KOs) is the No. 1 light heavyweight out there, and his power, technique and fighting heart have many fans and experts convinced that he's more than capable of running Canelo out of town. Beterbiev comes to fight, and history shows that Canelo is perfectly willing to engage regardless of who's in front of him. The Mexican star's ambition and free-agent status could go a long way to making this one a reality.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 70 PERCENT

CO-MAIN EVENT

DMITRY BIVOL vs. GILBERTO RAMIREZ

As with the main event, a clash between Dmitry Bivol and Gilberto Ramirez would pit Russia against Mexico. Bivol (19-0, 11 KOs) is the lone titleholder in this matchup, but both men are unbeaten, both are rated within the Top 5 light heavyweights according to The Ring (Bivol at No. 2 and Ramirez at No. 5), and both are highly respected by fans and media alike. Bivol is a career light heavyweight who drifted onto the world scene in 2017 when he picked up the WBA title. He has made eight defenses in total, including two in 2021. While his firepower has been lacking in recent years, the 31-year-old's technical ability and ring craft is undeniable. Ramirez, 30, made his bones at super middleweight, shutting out long-reigning titleholder Arthur Abraham in 2016 before following up with five defenses. The official move to light heavyweight came in April 2019 and he's stopped four opponents inside the distance. Southpaw Ramirez (43-0, 29 KOs), known as "Zurdo," has been pretty consistent in calling out Bivol and is currently rated No. 2 by the WBA. Both have been showcased on DAZN.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 70 PERCENT

UNDERCARD

CALLUM SMITH vs. JOSHUA BUATSI

Let's round this card out with a can't-miss all-British collision. As a former Ring Magazine champion and WBA titleholder at 168 pounds, Callum Smith is the one with the superior experience. And despite having only one fight at light heavyweight since officially moving up, the chilling one-punch knockout he produced against Lenin Castillo in September provided sufficient evidence that the Liverpool man has brought his explosive hitting power up with him. Joshua Buatsi was a bronze medalist at the Rio Olympics in 2016 and has made huge strides as a pro. Matched perfectly since turning over, the 28-year-old boxer-puncher looks ready to take on the world under the tutelage of acclaimed coach Virgil Hunter. However, it's conceivable that Smith would view this fight as a step back unless a legitimate world title belt is at stake.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 30 PERCENT

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT By Michael Montero

CANELO ALVAREZ vs. GENNADIY GOLOVKIN III

MAIN EVENT

This bout might be a tad past its due date, but it remains one of the most bankable potential matchups in the sport. Most fans would see it as a rubber match (believing Golovkin clearly won the first bout), and their first two meetings were Fight of the Year-worthy (the rematch officially won The Ring's 2018 award). They say "styles make fights," and these two go together like peanut butter and jelly. However, things have changed since their last encounter.

Alvarez (57-1-2, 39 KOs) is now the pound-for-pound king. Since the COVID outbreak in 2020, he has almost single-handedly carried the sport in North America. Canelo is 7-0 (5 KOs) since his second fight with GGG, having become the undisputed super middleweight champion in the process. Meanwhile, Golovkin (41-1-1, 36 KOs) has fought only three times (3-0, 2 KOs) in the same span. Neither has faced truly elite opposition over that time, but Canelo's opposition has been unquestionably superior to Golovkin's.

What does GGG, soon to be 40 years old, have left in the tank? Would he be willing to move up to 168 pounds to challenge Canelo for his undisputed crown? And would diehard fans be engaged, or are they burnt out on this rivalry?

FEASIBILITY RATING: 70 PERCENT

CO-MAIN EVENT

CALEB PLANT vs. JERMALL CHARLO

Caleb Plant was stopped in the 11th round of his unification fight with Alvarez last November. Although it was a tough loss, the Tennessee native made a career-high payday several times over. After making that kind of cash and increasing his profile with mainstream fans, he will find himself being called out by other fighters in the PBC universe very soon.

Other than his fight with Canelo, Plant's resume is pretty weak, even thinner than Jermall Charlo's. But unlike Plant, Charlo (32-0, 22 KOs) has yet to get "the big one" in terms of major fights. Perhaps a move up to 168 pounds and a win over "Sweet Hands" could get him a coveted spot in the Canelo Sweepstakes. As for Plant (21-1, 12 KOs), a win over Charlo would prove he is a legitimate top-level fighter and the loss to Canelo was nothing more than a learning lesson. In terms of logistics, this fight would be easy to make, as both men fight under the PBC banner. However, if Charlo, who has teased a move to super middleweight since last spring, can bypass Plant (or David Benavidez) and land Canelo for a Cinco De Mayo PPV event with his division debut, we all know he'll do that. Plant seems to understand this as well, given a January tweet that suggested they will "figure it out by the end of year."

FEASIBILITY RATING: 40 PERCENT

UNDERCARD

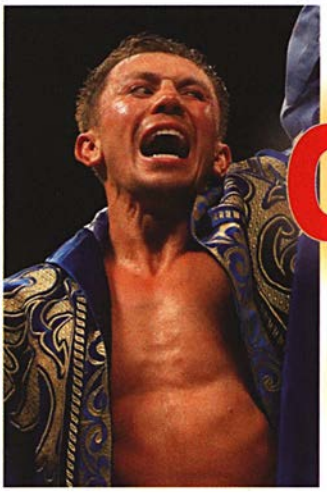
DAVID BENAVIDEZ vs. JACOBS-RYDER WINNER

The tall, rangy David Benavidez (25-0, 22 KOs) has never lost as a professional, but he's been stripped of the WBC title twice – once due to testing positive for cocaine in 2018 and the other for missing weight before his 2020 bout with Roamer Alexis Angulo. He would love to get a crack at Alvarez, but without a world title, he will likely remain on the waiting list.

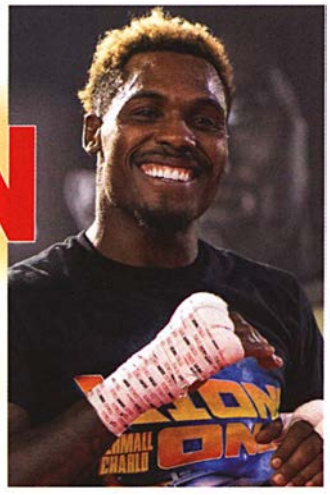
In the meantime, former middleweight titleholder Daniel Jacobs is set to face John Ryder on February 12 in the U.K. Should he be successful against Ryder, Jacobs (37-3, 30 KOs) would make for an interesting fight against Benavidez later this year. In fact, Jacobs would be the most accomplished and experienced opponent of David's pro career. A fight with Jacobs would provide invaluable experience for Benavidez and help build demand for an eventual showdown with Canelo.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 30 PERCENT

MIDDLEWEIGHT By Michael Montero



GENNADIY GOLOVKIN VS. JERMALL CHARLO



MAIN EVENT

Jermall Charlo's career has plateaued since the former junior middleweight beltholder moved up to 160 pounds in 2017. His best win to date was a unanimous decision over Sergiy Derevyanchenko, who had lost two of his last three coming in (split decisions to Jacobs and Golovkin). Despite that, the Texas native has managed to claim the WBC belt and the No. 2 spot in The Ring's middleweight rankings, right behind Golovkin.

The Boxing Twitter mob has grown increasingly impatient with GGG in recent years; some have even accused him of ducking Charlo (32-0, 22 KOs), as well as Demetrius Andrade. But the bottom line is a fight with Japan's Ryota Murata is much bigger economically. Golovkin was set to face Murata last December, but concerns over the spread of the COVID Omicron variant pushed it back. They will likely fight in April to unify the WBA and IBF titles. Should GGG be successful in that unification bout, a further unification with Charlo would be the best potential matchup in the division. And, if their current rankings hold, a Golovkin-Charlo matchup would be for the vacant Ring championship. But the question is, would it be worth Golovkin's time?

A third fight between GGG and Alvarez is still possible. And, despite Golovkin appearing to lose a step since their rematch in 2018, Canelo-Golovkin III remains one of the biggest commercial matchups in the sport. But even if that bout can't be made, potential fights between GGG and Jaime Munguia or Chris Eubank Jr. could possibly bring more to the table financially than a Charlo fight does. That may leave "Hit Man" on the outside looking in.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 50 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

CO-MAIN EVENT

DEMETRIUS ANDRADE VS. JAIME MUNGUIA

Demetrius Andrade (31-0, 19 KOs) currently holds the WBO middleweight title. The sanctioning organization recently mandated that he face Zhanibek Alimkhanuly of Kazakhstan next. Meanwhile, Jaime Munguia (38-0, 30 KOs) is scheduled to fight D'Mitrius Ballard in Tijuana on February 19. But putting sanctioning body politics and schedules aside, if a fight could be made between The Ring's current No. 3 and No. 4 middleweights, it would make for a fantastic contrast of styles.

The combined pro record of both fighters is a promoter's dream. Somebody's "0" would have to go! It would be Andrade's stylish, if not unorthodox, boxing against Munguia's come-forward aggressive style. However, Andrade is considering a move to the super middleweight division.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 20 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

UNDERCARD

ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY VS. EUBANK-WILLIAMS WINNER

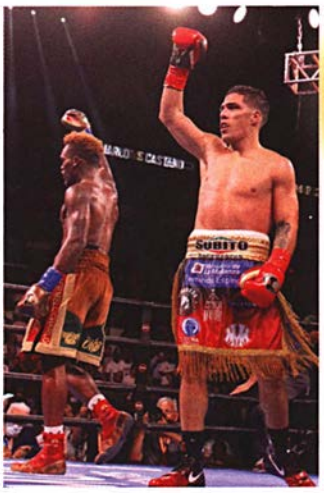
If Andrade were to vacate his belt for a move up to 168 pounds, that would leave the WBO middleweight title vacant. And with Alimkhanuly (11-0, 7 KOs) currently rated No. 1 by the organization, it would likely match him against the next highest-rated (and willing) contender for the vacant belt. Chris Eubank Jr., currently rated No. 5 by the WBO, is scheduled to face Liam Williams on February 5 in Wales. If he is successful, perhaps that puts him in line for the title shot against Alimkhanuly.

Eubank (31-2, 23 KOs) has bounced around between 160 and 168 pounds over the last several years. His last defeat came against George Groves during the World Boxing Super Series tourney in 2018, and he has reeled off five straight victories since.

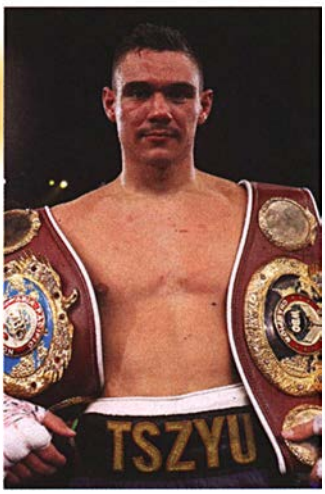
As for Alimkhanuly, the 2016 Olympian has been calling out the top names in the division recently. Eubank is a popular name in the U.K. and a fight against the Brit could raise his profile.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 30 PERCENT

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT By Michael Montero



CHARLO-CASTANO II WINNER VS. TIM TSZYU



MAIN EVENT

Last summer, Ring champion Jermell Charlo (34-1-1, 18 KOs) and Brian Castano (17-0-2, 12 KOs) fought to unify all four major junior middleweight titles in one of the best matchups of the year. Unfortunately, fans were left with a bad taste in their mouths as the bout ended in a split draw, which included a terrible 117-111 card from judge Nelson Vazquez (in favor of Charlo). But they are set to do it again early this year, and the winner will be the undisputed 154-pound champion of the world.

As accomplished as the winner of that fight will be, they won't be able to match the commercial star power of one Tim Tszyu (20-0, 15 KOs). The Australian son of former 140-pound great Kostya Tszyu has become a major star in his homeland. Not only that, "The Soul Taker" was recently named mandatory challenger for the WBO belt currently held by Castano.

If the Charlo-Castano rematch winner were willing to fulfill their mandatory obligation against Tszyu on the road, it would be a massive event Down Under. At the same time, if Tszyu were enticed to come to Las Vegas, the casino and foreign TV money would be substantial. Either way, this eventual matchup is a no-brainer.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 50 PERCENT

CO-MAIN EVENT

JARRETT HURD VS. SEBASTIAN FUNDORA

It wasn't that long ago when Jarrett Hurd was a unified titleholder and was seen as a future star in American boxing. However, he's only fought three times since 2018, losing two of those bouts. Still, the 5-foot-11 Hurd (24-2, 16 KOs) is one of the few junior middleweights who can match up physically with 6-foot-5 southpaw Sebastian Fundora, who towers over his opponents. The former titleholder's 78-inch reach nearly matches Fundora's massive 80-inch wingspan. Not only that, he would be the most experienced opponent Fundora (18-0-1, 12 KOs) has yet faced.

In terms of styles, this one would guarantee action. Hurd fights with a downhill, come-forward style that would apply constant pressure to "The Towering Inferno." In terms of logistics, this fight would be easy to make, as both are PBC fighters. And with Hurd being from Maryland, while Fundora fights out of California, the matchup would bring a fun "east vs. west" vibe to it.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 60 PERCENT

UNDERCARD

ERICKSON LUBIN VS. ISRAIL MADRIMOV

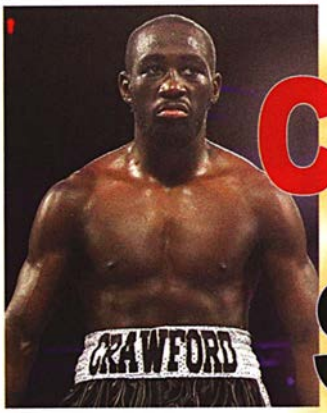
Erickson Lubin is currently riding a six-fight win streak following his lone defeat (via shocking first-round stoppage) to Charlo in 2017. With his sixth-round KO of former unified titleholder Jeison Rosario last June, Lubin (24-1, 17 KOs) earned mandatory status for the WBC title, which Charlo still holds. While he waits for another crack at the title, a fight with Uzbekistan native Israil Madrimov would be a lot of fun.

Lubin and Madrimov have 23 combined knockouts among their 32 wins. Both are 26 years old and fight with explosive, aggressive, fan-friendly styles. Although Madrimov (8-0, 6 KOs) isn't seasoned as a pro, he was a standout amateur and should be ready to face anybody currently rated in the top 10.

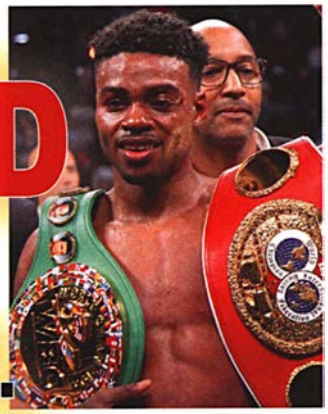
As exciting as this matchup would be, Lubin's management would likely want no part of it. With a mandatory shot at the Charlo-Castano rematch winner on the horizon, a fight against Madrimov would be too risky.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 10 PERCENT

WELTERWEIGHT By Michael Montero



TERENCE CRAWFORD VS. ERROL SPENCE JR.



MAIN EVENT

OK, I can hear the collective groans from many of you. I get it. This fight has been talked about by fans and insiders since Bud moved up to welterweight four years ago. And, sadly, it's no more likely to happen today than it was when I penned my "Welter Wait" piece previewing the dream matchup in the July 2019 issue of The Ring.

I should have named that article "The Cock Tease."

Some question whether Spence (27-0, 21 KOs) is the same fighter that he was before being injured in a terrible car accident in late 2019, and a subsequent eye injury last year. If they weren't convinced by his unanimous decision over Danny Garcia in December 2020, they'll find out with his next opponent, Yordenis Ugas, whom he's set to fight this spring in a three-belt unification bout.

For years, we've been told that the only roadblock preventing this fight was promotional/network ties. Well, that issue has been resolved, as Crawford (38-0, 29 KOs) is currently a free agent. But now the narrative has changed. In a recent interview, PBC vice president Tim Smith opined that a Crawford vs. Spence bout was not economically viable. His reasoning was that while the three-division titleholder is highly accomplished, Crawford has not been built into the "PPV star" that Spence is.

Maybe "PPV star" is an exaggeration to describe Spence, as his three pay-per-view cards have combined for around 800,000 buys. Canelo did the same figure when he stopped Plant. Meanwhile, Crawford's PPV sales have totaled maybe only half of the Texan's. So, if "Bud" continues to push for a 50/50 split with Spence, this fight will never happen.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 30 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

CO-MAIN EVENT

JARON ENNIS VS. VERGIL ORTIZ JR.

It cracks me up when some fans say, "These guys are too young to fight each other." Jaron Ennis and Vergil Ortiz Jr. are 24 and 23 years old, respectively. By comparison, Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns were 25 and 22 when they fought for the first time. Oscar De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad were both 26 years of age when they fought. I could go on here, but you get the point.

Both Ennis (28-0, 26 KOs) and Ortiz (18-0, 18 KOs) are the future of the welterweight division and will likely win titles all the way up to middleweight. Imagine if they kicked off a three-fight series at 147 pounds this year? It could become the 21st-century version of the Leonard-Hearns rivalry.

Unfortunately, the brain trusts of Ortiz and Ennis will likely follow boxing's usual business model and wait until their fighter is the mandatory challenger for whoever holds the sanctioning organization belts. Ortiz, who is promoted by Golden Boy Promotions and fights on DAZN, is already the No. 1 contender for Crawford's WBO title and Spence's WBC belt. Ennis, who is guided by Cameron Dunkin and fights on Showtime, is the top contender for the IBF title that Spence holds. The promoters would rather their fighters risk a loss in a title bout for the maximum amount of money a purse bid would bring in than against a fellow young gun.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 20 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

UNDERCARD

YORDENIS UGAS VS. JOSH TAYLOR

Josh Taylor has accomplished everything possible at 140 pounds. If the Scotsman takes care of business against mandatory challenger Jack Catterall on February 26, why not move up to welterweight? And since Crawford and Spence are fighting in our main event, why not challenge Yordenis Ugas, The Ring's No. 3-rated welterweight, for his WBA title?

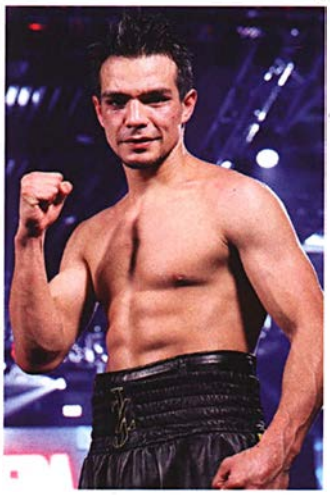
Taylor (18-0, 13 KOs) will be searching for big names when he eventually moves up to 147 pounds. Ugas (27-4, 12 KOs) now has such a name, as he is coming off the biggest win of his career, a unanimous decision over Manny Pacquiao last August.

In terms of styles, this would be a classic matchup. Although Ugas doesn't have devastating punching power, he does possess slick boxing ability and plenty of experience. As for Taylor, he proved that he can get it done on the road with his victory over Jose Ramirez last May in Las Vegas. No doubt he'd be willing to make a return trip to Sin City against Ugas – or any opponent – if the money were right.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 5 PERCENT

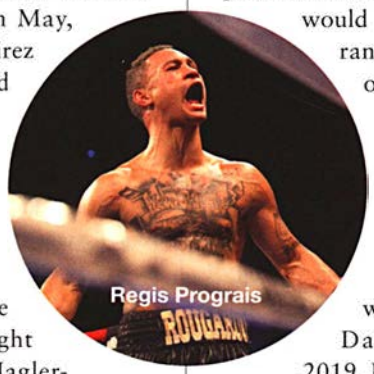
JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT By Joseph Santoliquito

JOSH TAYLOR vs. JOSE ZEPEDA



MAIN EVENT

Jose Zepeda has more than earned his shot at undisputed junior welterweight champion Josh Taylor. The 32-year-old southpaw won twice last year, beating the shopworn Hank Lundy when many thought Zepeda (35-2, 27 KOs) was shot after his war with Ivan Baranchyk in October 2020, the universally accepted Fight of the Year that featured eight knockdowns. In October 2021, Josue Vargas thought Zepeda was done, too, before their fight in Madison Square Garden. Zepeda proved otherwise by pounding the 23-year-old and winning by stoppage at 1:45 of the first round. All Taylor, 31, did was unify the junior welterweight division with an electric, close unanimous decision over Jose Ramirez in May, knocking down Ramirez twice. There are old legs in the 140-pound division, though Zepeda and Taylor aren't among them. They have both had their share of wars, however. This could be the junior welterweight version of Marvin Hagler-Tommy Hearns. They fit. Zepeda is 5-foot-8 with a 70½-inch reach. Taylor (18-0, 13 KOs) is 5-foot-10 with a 69½-inch reach. Zepeda is best when presented with a challenge – and there is no bigger challenge than Taylor at 140. There was some doubt that Zepeda had enough "dog" in him early in his career, but he's proved countless times in the last few years that he does. After being prodded and goaded by Vargas, Zepeda smoked him. Taylor-Zepeda is a 50-50 matchup and they're both with Top Rank. It's a very doable fight. It may not drive mainstream appeal, but it's an ideal fight fan's fight.



FEASIBILITY RATING: 80 PERCENT

★★★

CO-MAIN EVENT

REGIS PROGRAIS vs. SUBRIEL MATIAS

Regis Prograis hasn't made 140 pounds since October 2019, so would he make it against the rangy, powerful 29-year-old Matias? If Prograis can, Matias can throw 80-100 punches a round. Matias' last two performances have shown that he's come to terms with the Maxim Dadashev tragedy in 2019. Matias (17-1, 17 KOs) made 140 pounds and dispensed with Malik Hawkins and Batyrzhan Jukembayev, who combined had a 36-0 record before they faced Matias. The hesitation he displayed after the Dadashev fight seems to be gone. The 32-year-old southpaw Prograis, meanwhile, stopped Juan Heraldez and Ivan Redkach since losing the classic showdown to Taylor in 2019. Seeing a boxer/puncher like Prograis (26-1, 22 KOs) against a pure pressure fighter like Matias is always exciting. There is a chance this could happen. Matias is a PBC fighter, while Prograis is with Probellum, and Probellum president Richard Schaefer has a good relationship with PBC.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 70 PERCENT

★★★

UNDERCARD

TEOFIMO LOPEZ vs. ARNOLD BARBOZA JR.

Lopez, 24, still needs to prove himself at 140. He needs someone competitive, yet someone he can get his feet wet against. Barboza (26-0, 10 KOs) fits that role nicely. He's 30, undefeated and doesn't carry the kind of power to stir any trouble for Lopez, who physically can't make 135 on a championship level anymore. Barboza is far from a walkover and certainly very capable of beating "The Takeover," so he would serve as the perfect foil for Lopez (16-1, 12 KOs) to begin the new phase of his career. Barboza does everything well, nothing exceptional. It would tell Lopez where he stands. They're both with Top Rank. It could happen.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 80 PERCENT

GERVONTA DAVIS vs. RYAN GARCIA

MAIN EVENT

This is potentially the most explosive fight in the deepest division in boxing. Gervonta Davis had his hands full against late replacement Isaac "Pitbull" Cruz in December. Davis found hitting Cruz was like pounding your fist into a rock, there was no budging, but the southpaw from Baltimore won the fight by unanimous decision. Davis vs. Ryan Garcia is a bombs-away brawl. Neither fighter is afraid to take a risk and go for the knockout. Davis can be outboxed. Leo Santa Cruz proved that for almost six rounds. Garcia (21-0, 18 KOs) has an extensive amateur background, has fast hands, and has a huge left hook. It's the kind of power to make Davis respect him. But if Davis were to zap Garcia, it's short-circuit time like it has been for 24 of the 26 foes Davis has faced. Davis-Garcia is a fight the entire boxing world would want to see. The looming issue is when Garcia feels he's ready to return to the ring. "KingRy" has not fought in over a year, and hopefully that ends in 2022. He would need a nice, competitive fight to find his reflexes, and possibly even another fight to sharpen his timing. The last time Garcia fought was a signature seven-round stoppage over Luke Campbell in January 2021, a fight in which Garcia got up off the canvas in the second round to win. Garcia was working with Eddy Reynoso, and being in the same camp with Canelo Alvarez can only hone his mental game. With both fighters healthy and their minds set, this fight can produce fireworks. Davis would be favored. Garcia has the skills and the power to upset him. Davis has never faced anyone with Garcia's power. Davis is with Mayweather Promotions and Garcia is with Golden Boy. It might still be possible.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 40 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

CO-MAIN EVENT

GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR. vs. VASILIY LOMACHENKO

This world championship fight would be a co-feature only behind Davis-Garcia. Kambosos (20-0, 10 KOs) proved he is the real deal with his split-decision victory over Teofimo Lopez Jr. in November 2021, The Ring's Upset of the Year. The newly minted Ring/IBF/WBA/WBO lightweight champion could even go back to his old pal, the legendary Manny Pacquiao, as a sparring partner to prepare him for the crafty Ukrainian southpaw. Lomachenko (16-2, 11 KOs) proved he is back – and healthy – after twisting Richard Commey into knots in December 2021. The fight would take place in Australia, and Lomachenko may not have any misgivings, because he's fought all over the world. This fight could actually happen and probably will – if Kambosos gets his wish. Top Rank promotes Lomachenko, and Hall of Famer Lou DiBella promotes Kambosos. It's still a very doable fight. Kambosos isn't going to wait for a Lopez rematch, and besides, Lopez is not making 135 pounds again.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 90 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

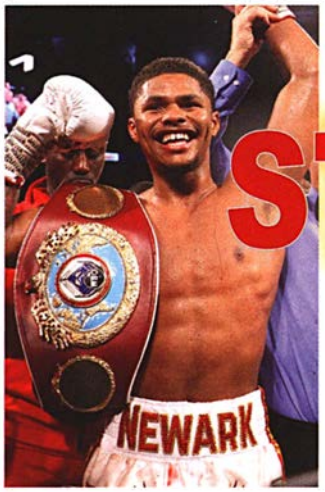
UNDERCARD

DEVIN HANEY vs. ISAAC CRUZ

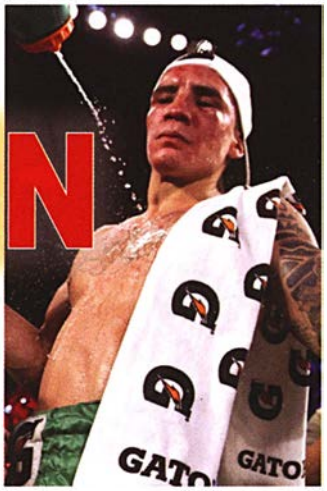
Isaac Cruz has nothing more to prove here. He gave Davis his toughest fight yet as a professional and did it on short notice. Cruz, who fought Davis to a standstill, is tenacious, sometimes inhuman in his ability to take a punch – and relentless. Cruz went back to showing everyone what they originally liked about him. He has all the ingredients WBC titlist Devin Haney needs to make the next step in his evolution as an elite pro. Haney (27-0, 15 KOs) is the quintessential boxer. Haney is a challenge for Cruz, because Cruz doesn't do well against pure boxers. And even though Haney is a boxer, his last two fights against Jorge Linares and JoJo Diaz were actually entertaining. The problem making this intriguing bout is that Cruz (22-2-1, 15 KOs) is a PBC fighter and Haney is with Matchroom. That's like trying to mix water and oil.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 10 PERCENT

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT By Joseph Santoliquito



SHAKUR STEVENSON VS. OSCAR VALDEZ



MAIN EVENT

In August 2021, Valdez tested positive for the banned substance phentermine, though his WBC 130-pound title defense against Robson Conceicao still occurred. The WBC did not strip Valdez of the title. Valdez won by close unanimous decision and the boxing world raised holy hell. But when isn't the boxing world raising holy hell? Valdez (30-0, 23 KOs) is a machine and undefeated. He's coming off his biggest year as a pro, pummeling Miguel Berchelt for the WBC title and successfully defending it against Conceicao. Valdez is the bigger puncher, though not the better boxer. Stevenson (17-0, 9 KOs), the WBO beltholder, is a master boxer who has some pop in his punch. Boxing has a history of forgetting about drug tests – and forgetting fast. Stevenson and Valdez are both Top Rank fighters, so it's a fight that can be made and, at press time, was rumored to be in the works for late April. Stevenson would be favored, based on his boxing skills and superior hand speed. He's coming off the biggest year of his career and the biggest win – stopping rough-hewn veteran Jamel Herring in the 10th. Beating Stevenson is a tall hill to climb for Valdez, who is not among the pure boxers in this division. But don't forget, the last time Valdez was doubted, he smoked Berchelt. Valdez is being trained by Eddy Reynoso and has made improvements. Anyone who thinks the "true version" of Valdez showed up against Conceicao is sorely mistaken. Stevenson, however, is a generational talent. He needs a victory over someone like Valdez to prove that promise is right.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 90 PERCENT

★★★

CO-MAIN EVENT

JAMEL HERRING VS. CHRIS COLBERT

Chris Colbert (16-0, 6 KOs) is a classic boxer and probably the second-best boxer at 130 pounds behind Stevenson. He would need this. He needs to fight someone who was a former world titlist. And Jamel Herring could use a victory over someone like Colbert to remain viable at 130. In his four biggest fights, Colbert has lost only four rounds. Herring, on the other hand, is coming off the Stevenson loss and a victory over a pair of shopworn fighters – Carl Frampton and Jonathan Oquendo – before that. We don't know how good Colbert can be yet. Herring (23-3, 11 KOs) could bring some of that out. Herring will also find out how much he has left. He is with Top Rank, Colbert with PBC. The two promotional giants have shown that they can work together. Case in point: Tyson Fury-Deontay Wilder II and III.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 60 PERCENT

★★★

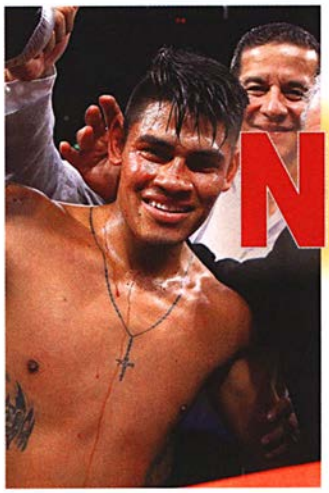
UNDERCARD

MIGUEL BERCHELT VS. XAVIER MARTINEZ

Xavier Martinez struggled against Claudio Marrero in October 2020, down twice in the eighth round before clawing back for a 12-round unanimous decision, and had trouble against Juan Carlos Burgos at times before winning by 10-round unanimous decision in May 2021. Martinez (17-0, 11 KOs) has not fought a former titlist. Still, he's ranked No. 9 at junior lightweight by The Ring. Berchelt is ranked No. 2, behind Stevenson, after being stopped in the 10th by Valdez. Now that he has had time to recover from the beating, Berchelt-Martinez is a pick-'em fight. Berchelt (38-2, 34 KOs) is still better than Marrero and Burgos and will provide the name on Martinez's resume to move forward. Or, a Berchelt victory renews his status in the division. In December 2021, Martinez left Mayweather Promotions to sign with Top Rank, which just happens to also promote Berchelt.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 80 PERCENT

FEATHERWEIGHT By Joseph Santoliquito



EMANUEL NAVARRETE vs. MAURICIO LARA

MAIN EVENT

This matchup between two come-foward Mexican fighters could be this generation's version of Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales, who eschewed defense in favor of offense. WBO titlist Navarrete is ranked No. 1 by The Ring, while Lara is ranked No. 2, so it would be for the legit featherweight world championship. In February 2021, Lara stopped former IBF featherweight titlist Josh Warrington in London, then came back to England in September for a rematch that was stopped in the second after Lara was cut over his left eye by an accidental head clash. Navarrete came away with two victories in 2021, stopping Christopher Diaz in April and dominating The Ring's No. 10-rated contender Joet Gonzalez in October. Both Navarrete and Lara are in their prime. Navarrete is 27. Lara turns 24 in February. Navarrete (35-1, 29 KOs) hasn't lost in 10 years. Lara (23-2-1, 16 KOs) hasn't lost in four years. Navarrete is something different at 126 with his 5-foot-7 height and 72-inch reach. He would be the favorite, though Lara has the power to make this very interesting. Navarrete is co-promoted by Top Rank and Zanfer, while Lara is with Eddie Hearn's Matchroom.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 40 PERCENT

CO-MAIN EVENT

GARY RUSSELL JR. vs. REY VARGAS

Vargas is 35-0 with 22 KOs, while Russell (31-1, 18 KOs) has the WBC belt and is considered the best boxer at 126. Vargas is not exactly an exciting fighter, but what makes this intriguing is that he was a distinguished titlist at 122 pounds. It's a fight that is very makeable, considering Vargas just became a PBC fighter, which is the same banner under which Russell fights. Vargas is not great at one thing but is steady at everything. It might not be a great fight, though it is a fight of significance, considering Russell does hold a major title. He has fast hands and will engage Vargas and cause him to come forward. Russell is 5-foot-4½ and Vargas is 5-foot-10½, which may help him offset that speed disadvantage. Maybe this causes Russell to fight more than once in a year, which he hasn't done since 2014.

Gary Russell Jr.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 60 PERCENT

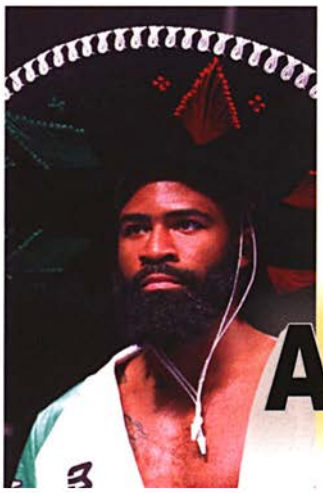
UNDERCARD

LEIGH WOOD vs. LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ

Lopez deserves a shot. He's earned it. He went 3-0 in 2021. The 28-year-old Mexican won a split decision over tough Andy Vences in July 2020, he stopped previously undefeated Isaac Lowe in seven in 2021, and that came after devouring the previously undefeated Gabriel Flores Jr. in September 2021. Wood, ranked No. 6 by The Ring, beat Can Xu for the secondary WBA featherweight title and is 33. Lopez has won his last seven bouts since losing to former world title challenger Ruben Villa in May 2019. Lopez is a pressure fighter. Can Wood keep him away? Wood has a fight scheduled against Michael Conlan in March, after winning two straight. Wood is with Matchroom. Lopez is with Top Rank. It could happen.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 40 PERCENT

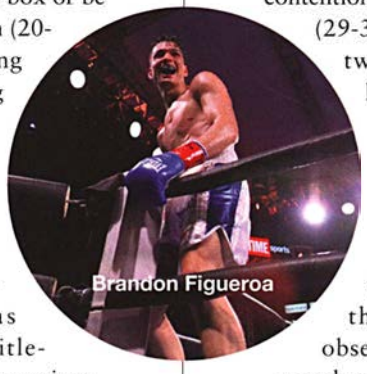
JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT By Ryan Songalia



STEPHEN FULTON vs. MURODJON AKHMADALIEV

MAIN EVENT

The top two fighters in the 122-pound division, both with a pair of belts and both undefeated. It doesn't take a lot of mental gymnastics to understand why this fight would be a natural. The vacant Ring Magazine title would be on the line and it would crown an undisputed champion. Fulton, holder of the WBC and WBO belts, and Akhmadaliev, who possesses the IBF and WBA titles, have been getting a lot of business done separately, with Akhmadaliev aligned with Matchroom Boxing/DAZN and Fulton aligned with Premier Boxing Champions/Showtime. In terms of styles, both fighters have shown they are versatile enough to box or be aggressive, with Fulton (20-0, 8 KOs) overcoming the suffocating pressure of Brandon Figueroa to unify his WBO belt with the WBC title Figueroa brought to the ring. Akhmadaliev (10-0, 7 KOs) was impressive in his title-winning performance against Daniel Roman and was devastating in dispatching mandatory challenger Ryosuke Iwasa in his first defense. While it seems that their promotional alliances will make such a bout a non-starter, Fulton has already called for a bout with Akhmadaliev, telling DAZN last year of the bout: "It's gonna happen. It will happen. It will happen. I believe it will happen."



Brandon Figueroa

FEASIBILITY RATING: 30 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

CO-MAIN EVENT

DANIEL ROMAN vs. BRANDON FIGUEROA

Figueroa (22-1-1, 17 KOs) felt he did enough to beat Fulton in their unification bout last November, and it's understandable why. He pressed the action from bell to bell but ended up on the short end of a majority decision. A bout with Roman would be a sensible transition back to contention for both men. Roman (29-3-1, 10 KOs) has won two straight since the loss to Akhmadaliev and didn't shame himself in losing the belts. A bout between two fan-friendly warriors who have overcome the doubts of some observers could be a fun matchup. Both fighters are currently under the PBC banner. However, Figueroa has stated that he's eyeing a move to the featherweight division.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 60 PERCENT

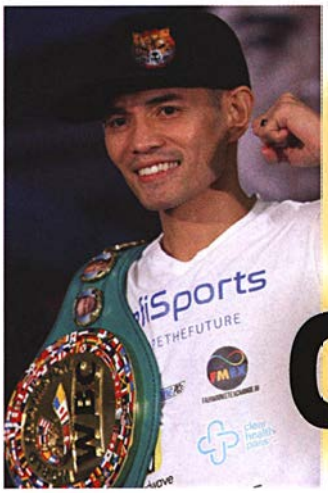
UNDERCARD

ANGELO LEO vs. MARLON TAPALES

Both are former titleholders looking for the next rung back up the ladder, and both make for fun fights. Tapales (35-3, 18 KOs) looks resurgent under new trainer Ernel Fontanilla, while Leo (21-1, 9 KOs) is back in contention with a win over Aaron Alameda last June to rebound from his previous fight – a unanimous decision loss to Fulton. Both fight under the PBC banner, which makes the bout feasible. Also intriguing: Leo is promoted by Floyd Mayweather, while Tapales is promoted by Manny Pacquiao, making for an interesting proxy rematch with the two biggest stars of their era. Tapales is now the mandatory challenger for Akhmadaliev, which means any such showdown would have to be put to the side until that business is handled.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 40 PERCENT

BANTAMWEIGHT By Ryan Songalia



NONITO DONAIRE VS. JOHN RIEL CASIMERO

MAIN EVENT

Moments after the first all-Filipino title fight in 93 years, between Jerwin Ancajas and Jonas Sultan, promoter Bob Arum declared that having Filipinos fight against each other did not make for compelling action because the compatriots treat it like a sparring session. It's fair to say that Arum couldn't have anticipated that Nonito Donaire and John Riel Casimero, two of the bantamweight division's titleholders, could generate so much polarizing animosity between each other. Donaire, the WBC beltholder, and Casimero, the WBO titlist, were set to fight one another last August, but a disagreement over VADA pre-fight drug screening, which Donaire has been a firm supporter of, scuttled the fight. Things then turned sour after Casimero insulted Donaire's wife/manager, Rachel, in a Facebook Live video, with Donaire saying he would not grant Casimero the "the stage or payday" that comes with unifying the belts. Donaire got a modicum of revenge when he watched Casimero lower his stock in a dreadful decision win over Guillermo Rigondeaux. Casimero then nearly lost his title in December after failing to show up to the weigh-in for his mandatory defense against Paul Butler in Dubai due to viral gastritis. Donaire handled his own mandatory in December against another Filipino, Reymart Gaballo, by fourth-round knockout, and Casimero still has to meet Butler to keep his title belt. But if the two of them can get past their personal drama, the bout could be the Foreman-Lyle of the bantamweight division, given that both are explosive offensive fighters who would be vying for the title of being the Philippines' top bantamweight and, potentially, a fight with Ring/IBF/WBA champ Naoya Inoue.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 40 PERCENT

★★★

CO-MAIN EVENT

NAOYA INOUE VS. GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX

Naoya Inoue showed in his life-and-death battle with Donaire that he stood tallest at 118 pounds. That was a power-punching festival, but how would Inoue fare against a slick boxer who lives to frustrate opponents? Rigondeaux, despite being 41, showed he could still negate an offensive fighter's entire game in his dreadful bout against Casimero last August. Does Inoue, with his seemingly limitless talent, have the craft to dominate the sport's purest boxer since Mayweather? Given Top Rank's acrimonious history with Rigondeaux and it being in their best interests to present Inoue in the most positive light, don't expect to see this fight on the schedule any time soon.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 10 PERCENT

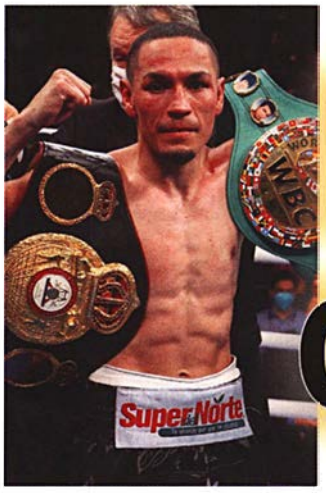
UNDERCARD

GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL VS. LEE MCGREGOR

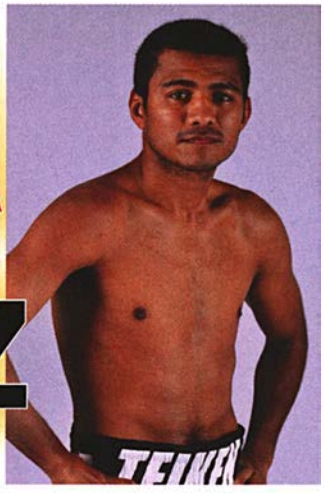
In what would be an old-school battle of the "not yet ready for primetime players," Scotland's Lee McGregor and America's Gary Antonio Russell would chart the path forward for two of the division's up-and-coming talents. Russell, one of several siblings competing in the sport (including WBC featherweight titleholder Gary Russell Jr.), showed his poise and experience in a unanimous decision win over former titleholder Juan Carlos Payano, but he also showed in last November's majority decision win over Alexandro Santiago that he could be bothered by a rough body-puncher who pressured him. That's what McGregor (11-0, 9 KOs) brings to the table. McGregor is coming off a fourth-round knockout of the previously unbeaten Vincent Legrand in August but found himself knocked down for the first time by Legrand, who, like Russell (19-0, 12 KOs), is a technical boxer. It could be a matchup between two fighters who are perfect foils for one another. With Russell fighting for PBC and McGregor still a rising prospect with MTK Global, don't expect to see this matchup unless mandated for a title fight.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 20 PERCENT

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT By Ryan Songalia



JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA vs. ROMAN GONZALEZ III



MAIN EVENT

If this rivalry was at featherweight (or heavier), it would be spoken of as one of the great trilogies in recent boxing history. Still, hardcore boxing fans have developed an appreciation for this rivalry, which will conclude with a rubber match on March 5 in San Diego, 10 years after they first crossed paths in Los Angeles. The first meeting, which was Gonzalez's final bout atop the 108-pound division, was buried on a WealthTV card and turned into an unexpected all-out brawl that elevated Estrada despite Gonzalez winning by wider-than-appropriate scores. Estrada followed that success by outlasting Brian Viloria to win the unified flyweight title in his next bout, beginning his parallel march up the pound-for-pound list. Both Estrada and Gonzalez would rise and fall and rise again in the following decade. They were grizzled vets by the time they met once again in March 2021, with a resurgent Chocolatito this time entering as the underdog. Many felt Gonzalez (50-3, 41 KOs) once again got the better of Estrada due to his heavier punching and pressure, but Estrada (42-3, 28 KOs) emerged with a split decision win to unify the Ring, WBA and WBC titles at 115 pounds. The rubber match will give the winner bragging rights in their legacies, and, hopefully, will elevate the rivalry to its rightful place in boxing history.

Estrada and Gonzalez in their rematch.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 100 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

CO-MAIN EVENT

JERWIN ANCAJAS vs. KAZUTO IOKA

It's been nearly six years and nine title defenses, and we're still waiting on Ancajas (33-1-2, 22 KOs) to face a top name at 115 pounds. We were scheduled to find out exactly what Ancajas was about as a world titleholder when he signed on to face Kazuto Ioka (28-2, 15 KOs) to unify the WBO and IBF belts on New Year's Eve in Japan. Those plans went by the wayside when Japan closed its borders due to the Omicron variant. Hopefully, that fight can be rescheduled for later this year, because it has the potential to be revealing and exciting.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 90 PERCENT

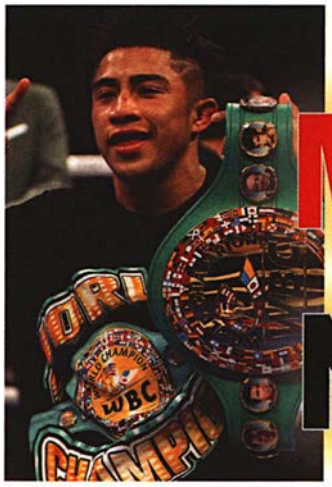
UNDERCARD

SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI vs. DONNIE NIETES

Speaking of Filipinos who are overdue for a career-defining fight ... At 39, Nietes (43-1-6, 23 KOs) is a little old to have his first breakout fight, and he might be slowing down due to age and inactivity, as evidenced by his draw against Norbelto Jimenez in December. His 2018 win over Ioka has appreciated thanks to the Japanese star's subsequent success, but the technical master's thin resume undermines his status as a four-division titleholder. A fight against an established name like Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, a much-celebrated and dangerous former champion, could be the missing piece to Nietes' legacy. And for Sor Rungvisai (50-5-1, 43 KOs), who was scheduled at press time to face Carlos Cuadras for the vacant WBC title on February 5, a win over Nietes could go a long way toward getting back some of the fame he enjoyed after his two victories over Chocolatito.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 50 PERCENT

FLYWEIGHT By Ryan Songalia



JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ VS. JUNTO NAKATANI

MAIN EVENT

There are many different style matchups that could be made at 112 pounds, but sometimes you just want to see two speeding cars collide. That's what a showdown between WBC titleholder Julio Cesar Martinez and WBO titleholder Junto Nakatani would be. These are two in-your-face bangers who can mix craft with real punching power. Martinez burst onto the scene in 2019 with a fifth-round KO of unbeaten Andrew Selby and a ruthless pounding of Charlie Edwards, which was called a no-contest due to a late hit when Edwards was on the canvas. Martinez returned four months later to stop Cristofer Rosales to win the vacant belt. He has made three defenses, but a fourth attempt, an eventual no-contest against McWilliams Arroyo, showed Martinez's defensive gaps. Martinez (18-1, 14 KOs) was dropped by a right hand in the first round but rallied back to drop Arroyo twice before a nasty cut caused by an accidental headbutt led to the fight being called off. Nakatani (22-0,17 KOs) may be the stud of the division and is not shy about trading punches. The rangy southpaw evokes comparisons to his compatriot Shinsuke Yamanaka in how he uses his distance to set up his heavy left hand, but he can also fight inside, and showed in his most recent outing, a fourth-round stoppage of former titleholder Angel Acosta in his U.S. debut, that he can take a punch too.

Making high-stakes unification bouts in the lower weight classes can be difficult, given the relative lack of clamor for these matchups outside of the most hardcore of boxing fans. But if ever there was a time to make some noise for a hipster-fest showdown, it would be this one. Not to mention, a bout between the No. 1-rated Martinez and the No. 2-rated Nakatani would fill The Ring's flyweight championship void.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 40 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

CO-MAIN EVENT

SUNNY EDWARDS VS. ARTEM DALAKIAN

With only four knockouts in his 17 wins, Edwards may not be the biggest puncher in the division, but he could be the classiest of the boxers. The former English national amateur champion has shown he can blend speed and combination punching in outpointing Moruti Mthalane for the title and mandatory challenger Jayson Mama in his first defense. Dalakian (21-0, 15 KOs) has quietly racked up five defenses of the WBA title he won by outfighting Brian Viloria in 2018. His reign has been a bit too quiet, with all of his title defenses taking place in his hometown of Kiev, Ukraine, and news of his defenses not traveling much further beyond those borders. This bout would help establish a top tier of the division, but it might take a bit of ambition from Dalakian to make.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 10 PERCENT

★ ★ ★

UNDERCARD

CRISTOFER ROSALES VS. MORUTI MTHALANE

If not for managerial issues in the middle of his career, Mthalane (39-3, 26 KOs) may have gone down as the greatest South African fighter ever. He may have shown he was past his best after getting out-hustled by Edwards to lose his belt last April, but Mthalane is still a dangerous fighter with the skill and poise to overcome a challenge when he's outgunned. For Rosales, the bout could offer an opportunity to get back into contention following the Martinez implosion and his title loss to Sunny's brother Charlie Edwards a year earlier. The bout could be possible, given that Rosales (31-5, 21 KOs) has done business with Mthalane's management team, MTK Global, in his fights with Edwards and Paddy Barnes.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 30 PERCENT

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT By Doug Fischer

HIROTO KYOGUCHI vs. FELIX ALVARADO

MAIN EVENT

Don't tell me that the 108-pound division can't produce a matchup that captures the imagination of hardcore fans (and even some casuals). It happened when two well-promoted battle-tested world titleholders – Michael Carbajal and Humberto Gonzalez – clashed for the first time in 1993. Top Rank-promoted Carbajal, an unbeaten IBF titleholder from Phoenix, Arizona, was a 1988 Olympic silver medalist who had been showcased on NBC and ESPN. Forum Boxing's Gonzalez, a two-time WBC beltholder from Mexico, had been introduced to U.S. fans via the Prime Network and KCAL-TV in Los Angeles. Their explosive unification bout was not only The Ring's Fight of the Year, it was chapter one of a trilogy that headlined pay-per-view events and garnered record paydays for the junior flyweight division.

Kyoguchi and Alvarado won't produce the box-office magic created by the Gonzalez-Carbajal rivalry – they don't have the Mexican/Mexican-American fanbases or the benefit of network/basic cable exposure that "Little Hands of Stone" and "Chiquita" had – but they can move the needle more than any 108-pound matchup since the first Roman Gonzalez-Juan Francisco Estrada fight. Why? They will go to war just like the aforementioned hall of famers and future hall of famers.

They are warriors who have earned their places atop the division and recent spots on DAZN-streamed cards in the U.S.

Kyoguchi (15-0, 10 KOs), a two-division champ from Osaka, is the kind of Japanese phenom boxing hipsters love to celebrate. He won his first world title in his eighth pro bout (15 months after his pro debut). He stopped veteran Hekkie Budler in 10 rounds to claim the Ring and WBA junior flyweight titles in his 12th pro bout.

Alvarado (37-2, 32 KOs), the IBF titleholder from Nicaragua, is the type of punisher that causes bloodthirsty ghouls to salivate. He's won 19 consecutive fights, 17 via stoppage (including NINE first-round knockouts).

This is a unification bout that DAZN will get behind. Their promoters – Kyoguchi is with Matchroom Boxing and Alvarado is with Golden Boy – are aligned with the streaming platform and are used to working together.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 75 PERCENT

★★★

CO-MAIN EVENT

MASAMICHI YABUKI vs. KENSHIRO TERAJI II

Before Teraji (18-1, 10 KOs) suffered a shocking 10th-round stoppage to unheralded Yabuki last September, the biggest fight to be made in the junior flyweight division was a showdown between the long-reigning WBC titleholder and Ring/WBA champ Kyoguchi, which could have been promoted like a Japanese Super Bowl.

Now Teraji's sole mission in boxing is to regain the WBC belt from Yabuki (13-3, 12 KOs), a rough-and-tumble banger whose headbutts late in their fight caused controversy that guaranteed a rematch. Teraji's team complained to the Japanese Boxing Commission and WBC, claiming Yabuki purposely used his head to open a severe cut above Teraji's right eye in Round 9, which led to his stoppage the following round. The JBC didn't buy the excuse, but the WBC reviewed the fight and ordered a rematch. Both fighters have agreed to do it again in the spring.

Diehards who missed their first bout, which was a candidate for 2021 Fight of the Year and Upset of the Year, won't overlook the rematch.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 100 PERCENT

★★★

UNDERCARD

JONATHAN GONZALEZ vs. JESSE RODRIGUEZ

After Teraji-Yabuki, the highest-profile junior flyweight upset in 2021 was Gonzalez's split-decision victory over defending WBO beltholder Elwin Soto in October. Gonzalez (25-3-1, 14 KOs) had been stopped in all three of his losses, so the 30-year-old southpaw was viewed as a KO waiting to happen against the heavy-handed pressure fighter. However, Gonzalez outboxed and outworked Soto while deftly avoiding the Mexican's bombs for 12 rounds. The victory vaulted the overlooked Puerto Rican to No. 4 in The Ring's rankings.

Rodriguez (14-0, 11 KOs), who scored a fourth-round KO of Mexican journeyman Jose Alejandro Burgos on the same DAZN-streamed card, is right behind Gonzalez in our rankings (he's also the WBO's No. 4 contender). The 21-year-old southpaw is the age of most prospects, but his poise, precision and fight-ending power (he's on a six-bout KO streak) give him the look of a future champion.

Everyone agrees the young Texan is ready for world-class opposition. Why not Gonzalez, whose ring-savvy style could finally test the hard-hitting technician?

FEASIBILITY RATING: 60 PERCENT

STRAWWEIGHT By Doug Fischer

KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART vs. THE PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART-WANHENG MENAYOTHIN WINNER

MAIN EVENT

The only strawweights in the 35-year history of the division that anyone gives a rat's ass about are Ricardo Lopez and Ivan Calderon, but as great as those masterful boxers were, they couldn't get on an HBO or Showtime broadcast during their dominant reigns in the 1990s and 2000s.

The top three strawweights – WBA titleholder Knockout CP Freshmart, WBC beltholder Petchmanee CP Freshmart and Wanheng Menayothin – are from Thailand. Of the three, only Menayothin has a name outside of his home country, mostly because he had surpassed 50 consecutive victories (getting to 54-0 before he lost the WBC title to Petchmanee), which spurred Twitter trolls to dub him "TBE" in hopes of triggering insecure Floyd Mayweather Jr. fans.

Menayothin has a February 22 rematch scheduled with Petchmanee, but now that his cherry's been popped, regaining the green belt won't earn him any attention outside of Thailand. If Petchmanee wins again, a showdown with Knockout might garner some shits-and-giggles social media attention as the "Battle of the Freshmarts."

Regardless of who holds the WBC title, a showdown with Knockout CP Freshmart, The Ring's No. 1-rated strawweight, has significance, as it would unify WBA/WBC belts and the vacant Ring title would be on the line. But has there ever been a unification bout between world titleholders from Thailand?

FEASIBILITY RATING: 10 PERCENT

CO-MAIN EVENT

ERICK ROSA vs. GINJIRO SHIGEOKA

These are the youngest and least-experienced Ring-rated strawweights, but they make a compelling boxer-vs.-puncher matchup.

Rosa (5-0, 1 KO), a 21-year-old southpaw from the Dominican Republic, earned a No. 8 ranking by upsetting seasoned veteran Vic Saludar via split-decision. Despite his nickname, "Mini-PacMan" is a tentative boxer who makes use of lateral movement and a sneaky left cross (which scored two knockdowns against Saludar).

Shigeoka (6-0, 5 KOs), a popular 22-year-old southpaw based in Tokyo, is just the opposite. The squat (barely 5 feet tall) slugger is a confident seek-and-destroy body-snatcher who saves his best shots for his opponents' ribcages. His first-round KO of Clyde Azarcon, who had gone the 12-round distance with current IBF titleholder Rene Mark Cuarto – is must-see YouTube if you've never seen Shiggy in action. (Yes, I've already given Shigeoka a nickname; I'm WAY more hipster than any of you.)

Shiggy would bring the heat, but the taller and more experienced Rosa would pose problems with his longer reach and ability to punch on the fly. I wish we could see this one this year, but I don't think either is ready to leave his home country yet.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 10 PERCENT

UNDERCARD

YUDAI SHIGEOKA vs. BYRON ROJAS

Neither is currently rated by The Ring, but they would still make for a fascinating crossroads bout.

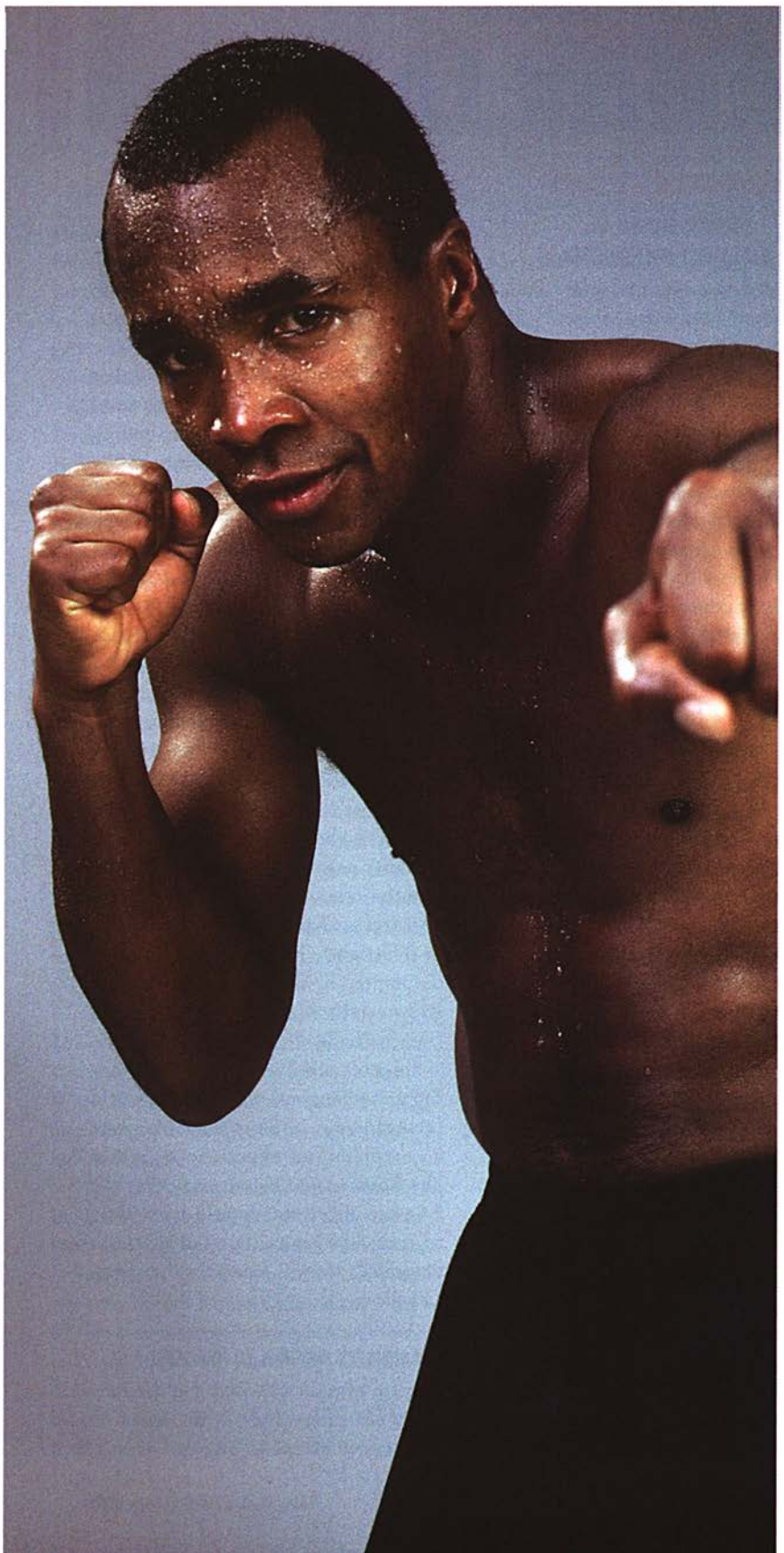
Shigeoka (4-0, 2 KOs), older brother of Ginjiro and the more decorated amateur of the two southpaw siblings, briefly held the No. 10 spot in the rankings after a 12-round majority decision over Tsubasa Koura in November. However, he was pushed out of the rankings when Erick Rosa entered a month later.

Rojas (27-4-3, 11 KOs), is a hard-luck Nicaraguan who was dropped from the rankings due to inactivity, but he was once a top contender. Rojas scored a close unanimous decision over Hekkie Budler in the then-WBA beltholder's native South Africa in March 2016, but he didn't go home with the strap because he didn't pay the sanctioning fee. Three months later, he dropped a narrow decision to Knockout CP Freshmart in Thailand, and in 2018 he was outpointed by the current No. 1-rated strawweight in a competitive rematch (also in Thailand).

Shigeoka looks like one of those Japanese phenoms who wins a world title before his 10th pro bout. However, a complete and experienced fighter like Rojas would be a true test for the 24 year old. Rojas would be willing to travel to Japan, but I'm not sure Shigeoka's team is ready for that steep a challenge.

FEASIBILITY RATING: 20 PERCENT

SUGAR RAY LEONARD
GREATEST HITS



THE DARLING OF THE 1976 OLYMPICS EVOLVED INTO THE TRANSCENDENT SUPERSTAR OF THE EIGHTIES THROUGH FIERCE RIVALRIES AND MEGA-SHOWDOWNS WITH FELLOW ALL-TIME GREATS

By **Anson Wainwright**

Sugar Ray Leonard became a household name when he won gold at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. His fast-tracked professional career only added to his fame and legend, as Leonard would go on to win world titles in five weight classes during the 1980s. Despite inactivity during the mid-'80s and only competing in 40 pro bouts, he is universally revered as one of the all-time greats.

Leonard was born in the coastal city of Wilmington, South Carolina, the fifth of seven children, on May 17, 1956. His family moved to the nation's capital when he was young before settling in Palmer Park, Maryland. Leonard followed his older brother Roger to the Palmer Park Recreation Center and soon after took up boxing.

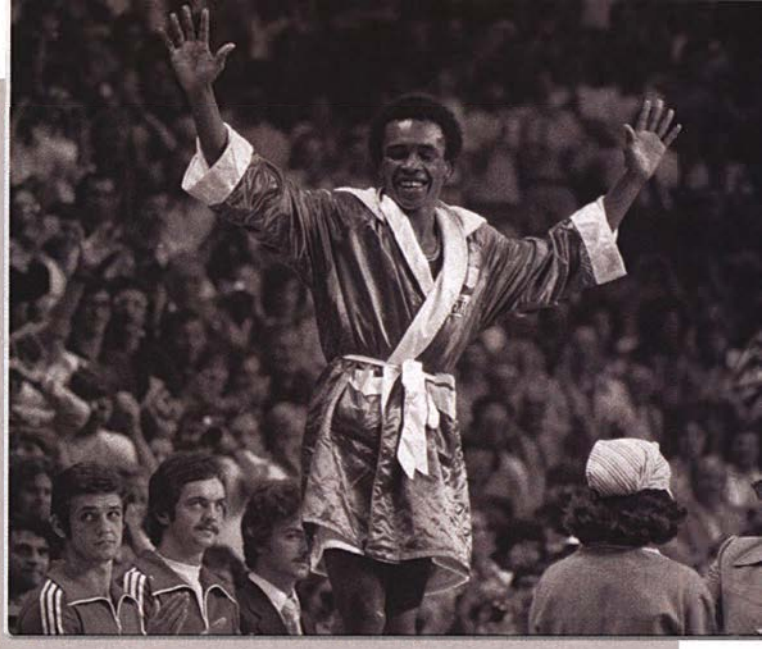
Early into his career, he was validated by the ultimate pound-for-pound king, "Sugar Ray" Robinson.

"I walked up to him and I said, 'Mr. Robinson, is it OK, because I've been using your name?'" Leonard told The Ring. "He said, 'Absolutely. I'm proud. Thank you so much.'"

Leonard failed to make the 1972 Olympic team, lying about his age (he claimed he was 17 when he was 16) to compete in the Eastern Trials, but he came back more experienced and stronger to become a U.S. representative at the 1976 games. It was a moment that would forever change his life.

ANDRES ALDAMA

July 31, 1976, Maurice Richard Arena, Montreal • Titles: Olympic gold medal, 141-pound division



"It wasn't about money or fame or anything; it was about representing myself and my country on the highest stage possible. This is global. Nothing is better than the Olympics. The Olympics is by itself; it stands alone as far as reputation, competition, value. People can say they were a world champion, but very few can say, 'I was an Olympic gold medalist.'

"I felt so confident, but the Cubans were so dominant. I recall I was in this room and I was watching the previous fights, and they'd say, 'That's Ray Leonard. He's fighting that Cuban guy. He's going to get knocked out.' I heard that, but they didn't know I was there.

"What people don't know and realize, when I stood on that podium with the gold medal draped around my neck, the national anthem being played, I had so many mixed feelings, firstly because I was so happy. I won the gold medal, but I thought it would be my last fight, because I had no intentions of becoming a professional fighter. I'd heard so many horrible stories about that. I had a scholarship to the University of Maryland; I was going to go to college, further my education, get a great job and life goes on. But boxing was saying, 'No, you've got to go this way; this is your road.' So it was inevitable I became a professional fighter. It was meant to be that I became a professional fighter and a champion. When I think of that, it almost brings tears to my eyes, because at that precise moment standing on that podium, this was it. But no, I was kind of confused, a lot of emotions. I just didn't know where I was going."

RESULT: LEONARD UD

Whatever Leonard imagined for himself in that moment, a star had been born. He turned professional amid considerable fanfare with a six-round unanimous decision over journeyman Luis Vega in front of a crowd of more than 10,000 in February 1977.

From that launchpad, the burgeoning superstar became a headliner in the D.C. area and stayed active on the undercards of events like future opponent Marvin Hagler vs. Roy Jones and the heavyweight eliminator between Ken Norton and Jimmy Young.

After 18 months, Leonard was already fighting 10-round fights, handling veterans such as Rafael Rodriguez (UD 10), and fellow up-and-comers Dick Eklund (UD 10) and Floyd Mayweather Sr. (TKO 10). There was an air of confidence about him and the way he took care of business that screamed star power.

Leonard continued to move through the ranks by impressively beating the likes of perennial contender Randy Shields (UD 10), four-time world title challenger Armando Muniz (TKO 6) and seasoned campaigner Pete Ranzany (TKO 4).

Leonard was blessed with many gifts inside the ring: exceptionally fast hands, clever footwork, ring smarts and underrated power. However, we didn't get to see the other side of what makes a fighter: the intangibles – the things that you have to show when you face a fighter just as talented as yourself. The opportunity to demonstrate that came when he met Puerto Rican phenom Wilfred Benitez in November 1979. Leonard had to fight through and past the limits, showing he had the heart of a champion in claiming the WBC welterweight title.

It proved to be just the beginning. After a routine win over Dave "Boy" Green, Leonard again showed his mettle in a shootout with bitter rival Roberto Duran. Fighting the fierce Panamanian at his own game proved foolhardy and resulted in Sugar Ray's first loss, but it again emphasized that he had incredible substance behind his considerable skill set. The direct rematch was further testament, as Leonard completely rethought his approach and boxed Duran en route to the incumbent titleholder's now-famous surrender.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Leonard took a stay-busy fight up at junior middleweight, claiming the WBA and Ring Magazine 154-pound titles against underrated Ayub Kalule.

Leonard promptly dropped back to welterweight and met rival champion Thomas Hearns.

Main Events' Kathy Duva, who promoted the fight alongside her late husband, Dan, vividly recalls the superfight that more than lived up to its considerable billing and proved to be one for the ages.

"It was the fight everybody was waiting for," said Duva. "It was the perfect scenario for a fight. The matinee idol with the gold medal, Ray Leonard, against Tommy from Detroit, the big puncher. It had a

little bit of everything.

"I remember Ray's eyes, like two coals burning, as he looked across the ring at Tommy.

"They had this amazing fight where it looked for all the world like Tommy was going to win, and Ray, every round, started trying something different until he hit on what worked."

After a well-deserved victory lap, Leonard took out Bruce Finch in three rounds and was due to face Roger Stafford, but his plans were derailed by a partially detached retina in his left eye, which led to a stunning retirement. From there, Leonard fell into a party lifestyle that revolved around alcohol and cocaine.

Sugar Ray's life needed boxing, and he returned after a 27-month absence against fringe contender Kevin Howard. Although Leonard ultimately stopped Howard in nine rounds, he suffered the ignominy of a fourth-round trip to the canvas and was disappointed with his performance. He retired a second time but still worked as a color commentator for HBO.

The lure of a matchup with Hagler proved too much, though, and Leonard came back to face the long-reigning middleweight king in April 1987. Leonard sensationally upset Hagler, using all his tactical sense to eke out a split decision and become a three-weight champion.

While most would be more than content with that, Leonard moved up again to defeat the much bigger Donny Lalonde in a fight for super middleweight and light heavyweight titles.

"I love challenges," Leonard admitted. "That's what makes me tick. That's what makes me who I am against these incredible, great champions."

He fought former adversaries Hearns (D 12) and Duran (UD 12) in 1989. Both fights did robust business and garnered massive paydays, making Leonard the first boxer to earn more than $100 million during his career, but he showed signs of slowing down in the ring. He suffered two knockdowns against Hearns in their long-awaited rematch, and although he clearly outpointed Duran in their rubber match, he incurred 60 stitches' worth of facial cuts from his archrival's head and fists late in the bout. Leonard retired soon after the Duran bout. However, the king of comebacks would make two more ill-advised returns against Terry Norris (L UD 12) in 1991 and Hector Camacho Sr. (L TKO 5) in 1997 before bowing out for good.

A fit and spry 65, Leonard enjoys tennis and spending time with his family. He also dedicates his energy to the Sugar Ray Leonard Foundation, which supports research for diabetes.

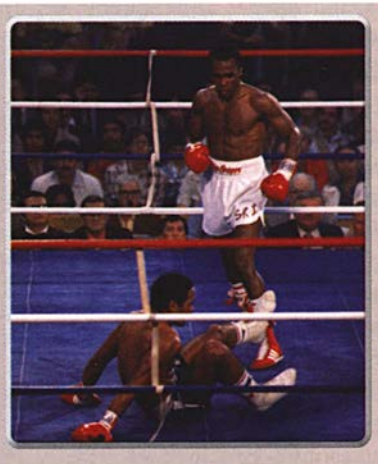
"My father was diabetic," he said. "Every May, we do a boxing event with Golden Boy Promotions. We've raised well over three-and-a-half million dollars.

"Life is what you make it. I can't complain, because where I am, what I've achieved, I try to give back, especially to this sport. If it wasn't for boxing, I wouldn't be here now. I made an impact in the ring; I just want to make a larger impact outside the ring, helping people."

Here's what he had to say about his most memorable nights in the ring:

WILFRED BENITEZ

November 30, 1979, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas • Titles: Ring and WBC welterweight



"I loved the challenge. I loved being the underdog. And when I walk to the ring, I don't think about losing whatsoever; I just think of what needs to be carried out – tunnel vision. That's believing in yourself. Because if you don't, nobody else will. And that's what I had over some of the guys.

"I love it when there's tons of people, fans, when it's a big fight, incredible opponent. Wilfred Benitez was an amazing young champion, far more experienced than me, so much talent – a natural talent. You can't teach some of the things he had. He was like a radar. He was amazing. Going 15 rounds, that was one of the biggest challenges.

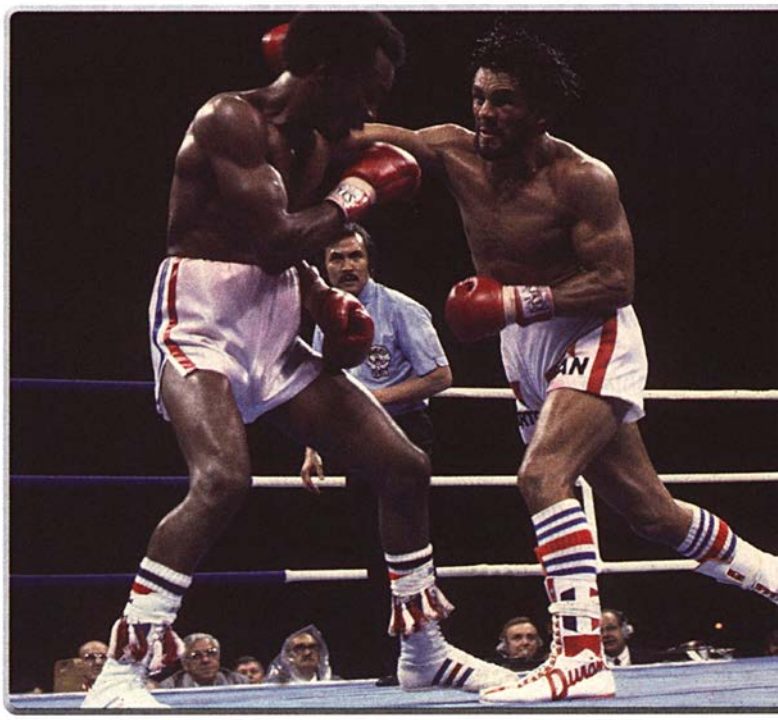
"It was a chess match. He was surprised – I saw it in his eyes – at my speed, and then he had speed. I was naturally a better puncher than he was. He was very elusive; he seemed like he was right there in front of me – I never missed so many punches in a ring like I did with him. That championship fight, when I won, it was the biggest gift I ever thought I would receive. I went back to my hotel, I was so dehydrated. After 10, 12 rounds, I was exhausted; I fought him just with heart. I could be exhausted, but if I rock you, I normally finish the job, because I'm [overflowing] with intestinal fortitude. It's something inside all of us, but we can't all activate it, and that's how I got rid of him in the 15th. I knocked him down one time and I never let up. He doesn't get credit for it, but he was one of my toughest fights.

"I just went to my hotel and went to bed. I was so happy, elated, so proud, but when you've just faced one of the all-time greats ... Although he's not given the total respect he deserves, I still would rate him as one of the greatest fighters, too."

RESULT: LEONARD TKO 15

ROBERTO DURAN I

June 20, 1980, Olympic Stadium, Montreal
• Titles: Ring and WBC welterweight



"That was more than a big fight; it was going to make me who I wanted to be. I can smell his breath now; I go so deep.

"I won the gold medal in Montreal, and when I walked to the ring I heard some boos – that on top of Roberto Duran, he would say some foul things to me, gave me some hand gestures, gave my wife hand gestures. I was angry. He got under my skin and I wanted to beat him at his own game. I didn't realize that was not a smart move until the middle-to-late rounds.

"Roberto Duran was my teacher; he was the guy who was going to show me to fight the right way, not to lose your temper, not to get mad, not get angry but stay composed. I paid for it.

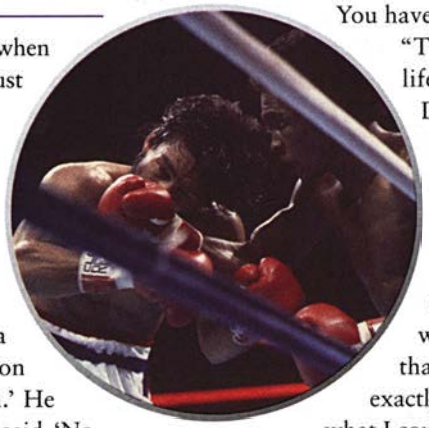
"Even then I considered retiring, because the punches he hit and landed were so painful. 'Manos De Piedra,' no question; he was that. He hit me so many places, I was looking around saying, 'Who else is in the ring with us?' He never let up. It was like perpetual motion. He was all over the place.

"I figured I'm too big for this guy; that was not the case in there. This is what he did to me: He got inside my head, he hit me with body shots – I've never been hurt by body shots, but it rocked me. I looked at his eyes; they were dark and they were deadly, no tomorrow for him. I never saw anyone with so much intensity."

RESULT: DURAN UD 15

ROBERTO DURAN II

November 25, 1980, Superdome, New Orleans
• Titles: Ring and WBC welterweight



"I took my wife – she fainted at ringside when [Duran] got the decision – to Hawaii to just get away. No more boxing.

"The next morning, I'm running on the beach and I'm hearing people say, 'Ray, you could beat Duran if you boxed him. You shouldn't have stood toe-to-toe.' Like I don't know this. So I called my business partner, Mike Trainer. I said, 'Mike, I want to fight Duran in a rematch,' and he said, 'Ray, aren't you on vacation with your wife?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'We can talk when you get home.' I said, 'No, I want to fight him.' Total different mindset.

"I knew I could do better. That takes a lot of understanding what you've been through. I'd felt the punches of – my friend now – Roberto. They say life is what you make of it. It's true. The fight game is what you make of it.

"He had his lifestyle. I had something of a lifestyle but did things more in moderation, to my knowledge. If I had waited a year or two, he would still be in my head.

"If I do things my way – boxing, counterpunching, use my hand speed – nine times out of 10, I'm going to beat you. That's what I did in the second fight. I stepped up to the plate. I experienced it, so I know what takes place. You have to be 100 percent.

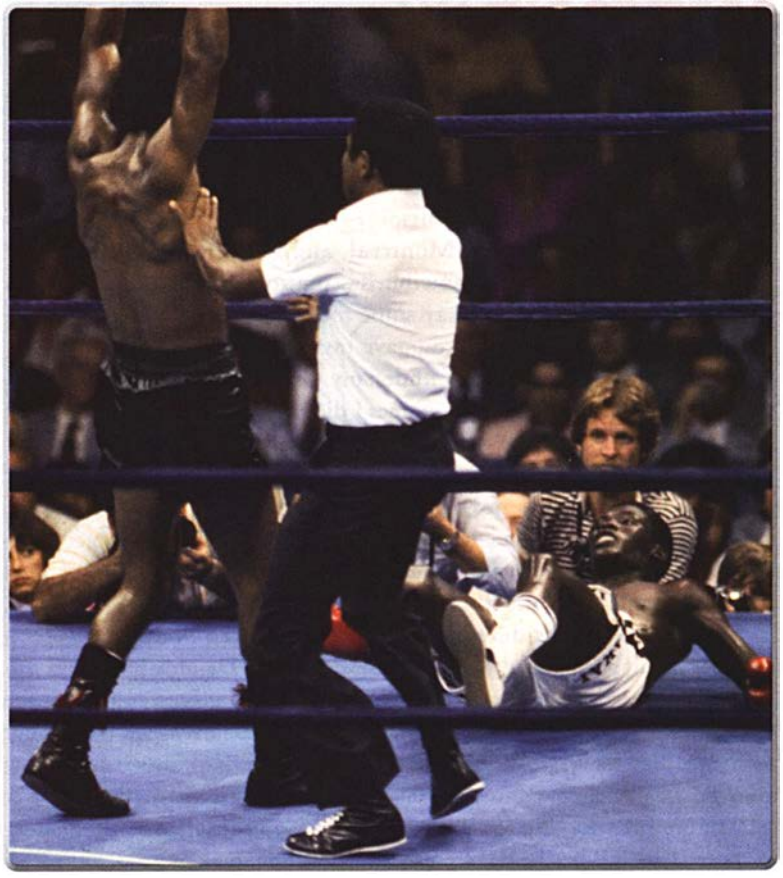
"Timing is important in every aspect of life, and boxing too. My trainer, Angelo Dundee, said he wanted to make sure I peaked at fight night. That was so important. I was so ready; my weight was OK. This particular fight, there was no B.S. in my training camp; everything was serious. I'd train, go back to my room and watch that fight again, which was tough to watch me get beat up. But that is what was required for me to know exactly what he could do, which was a lot, and what I could do, which was a lot. But if I did it my way, I can beat him.

"I didn't hear him say, 'No mas.' He did this. (waves his hands) Duran is a sweetheart now but was a bully in the ring, which was a plus. When I did things and made people laugh, that's when it gets into your head and mentally broke him. If someone was hitting me and people were laughing, it would dilute my confidence, and everything is in the mind and heart for the most part."

RESULT: LEONARD TKO 8

AYUB KALULE

June 25, 1981, Astrodome, Houston • Titles: Ring and WBA junior middleweight



"Kalule was tough, very tough. Kalule was so awkward and dedicated and determined. He was a little taller than me and he was a southpaw.

"I do remember I wasn't pumped up for him because he didn't have the big name. But what took place in the ring that night, I was 100 percent in shape, but I didn't have that additional aggression. He growled at me and for some reason it upset me, but it brought me to that zone and level of mindset. I said, 'I'm going to get you for that.' I used that growl to be more aggressive.

"When everyone says, 'You're going to win the fight,' it takes something away, because I was supposed to win. Then it goes through your mind and you take them for granted. That's what I learned not to do. I take everyone like they're King Kong."

RESULT: LEONARD TKO 9

THOMAS HEARNS

September 16, 1981, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas • Titles: Ring, WBA and WBC welterweight

"I'd heard of Tommy Hearns. Then I got to know Tommy Hearns, because I would go and see some of his fights and would do some of the color commentary with HBO. He was a beast in that ring, a freak of nature in the ring at 147 – long arms, fast, big-time heart, almost too big.

"I had a black eye [in training camp]; his jab [made the injury worse]. It was tough to get close to him because he was so fast, powerful and accurate. In the middle-to-late rounds, Angelo Dundee said, 'You're blowing it.' Fighters know when we're losing, so I knew Tommy was winning, but to hear Angelo Dundee say it that way, with that tone ... He wasn't angry. Angelo Dundee kept his composure. He wasn't freaked out that I was on the losing end of that fight.

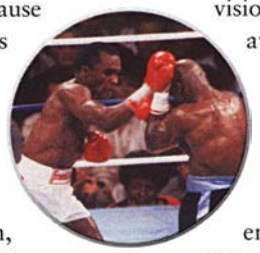
"[Hearns] was boxing, slipping and sliding. I said, 'I've never seen Tommy do this.' Because he normally knocks everyone out. I threw bodyshots, and when I did hurt Tommy, that's what I can do. When I'm exhausted, I can close the show. That's when that intestinal fortitude comes into play – I want it more than you do. It's hard to articulate, but all great, legendary fighters have that moment when they look and nothing else exists. That's something you can't teach. Tommy made me who I am. Duran made me who I am. Hagler ... go down the line. Same thing with them. We brought the best out of each other."

RESULT: LEONARD TKO 14

MARVIN HAGLER

April 6, 1987, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas • Titles: Ring and WBC middleweight

"To me, Marvin Hagler was one of the greatest, if not the greatest middleweight champion – respected, loved, admired, tons of fans. I never thought it would happen, because of my eye injury. It had been three, four, five years I'd been out of the ring.



"It was Roberto Duran; I was doing commentary on his fight with Hagler [in November 1983]. I didn't think Duran could go the distance, but he showed me something. He walked over to me and said, 'Ray, you box him, you beat him.' During that time, I was out drinking, cocaine, everything bad for you. I thought about it, but it didn't resonate. It didn't seem that important. I was OK, but every month, every year it would pull me and I would soften those blows with alcohol and cocaine.

"I saw something [when Hagler fought John Mugabi in March 1986]. I said, 'I can beat that guy. I can beat him.' After that fight, I called my friends, business partners, my brothers, and they said, 'I understand you're considering fighting Hagler?' I said, 'Yeah.' My brother Roger said, 'Who's your tune-up?' I said, 'Hagler.' He said, 'No, who's your tune-up before the fight?' I said, 'He is, because he's going to motivate me.' Even my brothers didn't understand, it's hard for me to get up where I am today. I told my father-in-law, I said, 'I'm going to fight Marvin Hagler.' He said, 'Ray, excuse me? You can't do that. Hagler's going to kill you.' But that's what motivates me.

"People cared about me. My family cared about me. When they said detached retina, they said, 'You can go blind.' Everything is possible, but I didn't think about the eye, because I had one of the best ophthalmologists. When he did the surgery, he said, 'If you want to go back in the ring, you can, because now your left eye is stronger than the right eye.'

"I know with Hagler, it was like me with other fighters. They said, 'Ray, you can beat him. He doesn't have a chance.' You have to believe in yourself, because if you don't, no one else will. When I'm in that ring, when I have tunnel vision, I know I'm going to win the fight. I know right away. I know within a minute of getting in the ring I'm going to win, because I'm confident. I'm 100 percent in shape, no shortcuts. I knew that night.

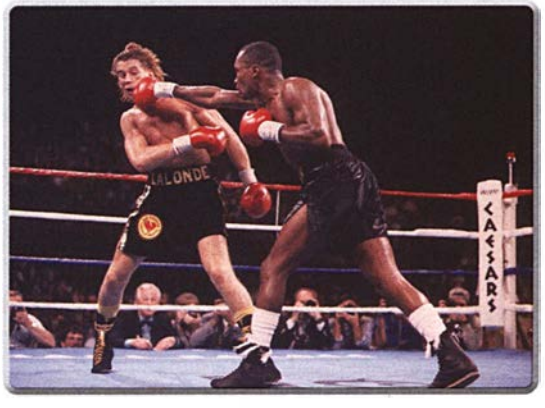
"My training camp was impeccable, no B.S. I used to have friends over, just people in general my brothers and sisters would bring; the entourage would be so much. For Hagler, I said, 'No, no one's coming here.' Preparing for the Hagler fight, I worked out for over a year. I had to get used to getting hit again. When you're out the ring for beyond a year – two, three years – this is not real. I worked on that. My sparring partners used 8-, 10-ounce gloves; I used 14-ounce gloves. I want to get that feeling in. It sounds crazy, but it worked. I could withstand his punches.

"It was a statement. I said, 'I'm a winner either way, because I went the distance with Marvin Hagler.' Two things happened: Someone walked up to me [at the end of the fight before the scorecards were read] and said, 'You won the fight.' I said, 'What? OK.' Then when Hagler did a little dance, that was uncharacteristic; Hagler doesn't do that. I understand that fighters know when we lost, when it's too close for comfort. Most fighters won't say it. Bravado. I always felt I won. (laughs) I threw a lot of shots before the bell would ring. I had my guy yell out from camp, '30 seconds, Ray.' I would throw punches and catch the judges and everyone else's eye – they are landing, the last thing that happened [in the round]."

RESULT: LEONARD SD 12

DONNY LALONDE

November 7, 1988, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas • Titles: WBC super middleweight and WBC light heavyweight



"He hit me so hard. His big punches, the right hand, hurt me and had me on the level of being stopped, but I had so much heart, drive, desire.

"I told Donny this; I said, 'When you knocked me down, I heard someone say in the audience, 'Take out that N-guy." That fan helped me; he won me the fight. I don't hear that ever. When I heard that, I was down and almost ... not giving up, but it's not there anymore. But that reversed everything in my head, and ... hell, no. And I got up. I told Donny, 'You should get that guy and punch him out. (laughs) I know it's not real, but it was real. I got up and went crazy because I had that thing that not a lot of fighters have, that you can rectify and come back like a true champion, true warrior.

"I relinquished that crown so fast. When I weighed in, I had silver dollars in my pocket to weigh a little more."

RESULT: LEONARD TKO 9

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

STILL BUILDING CHAMPIONS

EMANUEL STEWARD'S LEGACY LIVES ON IN DETROIT THROUGH A REJUVENATED KRONK PROGRAM LED BY BOXER-TURNED-BUSINESSMAN JEFF STYERS AND SYLVIA STEWARD-WILLIAMS

By Michael Montero

Opposite page: Emanuel Steward poses with Oba Carr, Michael Moorer, Leonzer Barber and Jamal Hinton.

When most fight fans think of the Kronk gym, they immediately picture the "Motor City Cobra," Thomas Hearns. They think of other Detroit-bred fighters like Duane Thomas and the McCrory brothers (Milton and Steve). They remember all the amateur standouts and the great world champions who have trained there for decades, including current Ring heavyweight champion Tyson Fury.

They also think of tragedy. The original gym located at 5555 McGraw Avenue closed in 2006 after thieves stole copper water pipes from the building. A new facility was opened at a different location after the original structure was condemned by the city. Then, in 2017, the old Kronk was destroyed in a suspicious fire, one of the thousands that largely go unsolved in Detroit every year.

But perhaps more than anything or anybody else, the Kronk name is synonymous with Emanuel Steward.

Steward, who was born in West Virginia but moved to Detroit at the age of 12 with his mother, had a stellar amateur boxing career. His 94-3 amateur record included a national championship in the bantamweight division at the 1963 Golden Gloves. After his fighting days, he started the boxing program in the basement gym of the Kronk Community Center during the early 1970s, embarking on a legendary training career in which he instructed more than 40 world champions.

STILL BUILDING CHAMPIONS

Emanuel guided Hearns to one of the most storied careers in the history of boxing as one of the "Four Kings," alongside Sugar Ray Leonard, Roberto Duran and Marvin Hagler. He revived the careers of struggling heir-apparent heavyweights Lennox Lewis and Wladimir Klitschko, both of whom came to him after early knockout losses and went on to achieve hall-of-fame credentials under his tutelage. He opened his home to fighters like Ireland's Andy Lee, who lived and trained with Emanuel for much of his pro career. There are seemingly countless examples of Steward improving fighters in the ring. But ask anybody who knew him, and they'll tell you his proudest achievement was developing better human beings outside of the ring – especially young people. He referred to his work with youth as "Emanuel Steward's Champions of Tomorrow," or ESCOT, and he took tremendous pride in it.

"If you look back at the history of Kronk, it always started with Emanuel working with children, helping them develop in and out of the ring," said John Lepak, Kronk's new business manager. "His car would be packed with him and seven or eight kids. He used to tell me stories of cutting a McDonald's Egg McMuffin into little pieces that they could all eat before their amateur fights."

Lepak, who grew up training at the old Kronk and went on to have a successful career on the business side of the sport, ended up working alongside Steward for years. He still laughs about the first lesson he learned on the job. "I was told on my first day in the office that of all the things to call Emanuel, never call him Manny," he told The Ring. "He could not stand being called Manny. But the nickname stuck." Working so closely with Steward at Kronk, Lepak witnessed his leadership change lives firsthand. "There were so many success stories based on the foundations that Emanuel taught them at such a young age," he said.

Now, almost a decade after his death in 2012, several members of the Detroit boxing and business communities have joined forces to ensure that Steward's legacy lives on.

Sylvia Steward-Williams, Emanuel's daughter, took over as CEO of Kronk after her father's passing. She helped open up a new gym in 2015 located in the basement of a church across town. But although the fighters had a place to train, youth development had fallen by the wayside. This concerned Steward-Williams.

"The Kronk name is internationally known," she said. "You can wear a Kronk shirt in Japan and they know it's boxing. But the problem was with our youth department. Our young amateur fighters were doing well in the ring, but I wanted to add a youth development program that focused on education."

That's where Jeff Styers comes in.

If you were plugged into the Detroit boxing scene in the 1980s and 1990s, you were undoubtedly familiar with Styers. Born in nearby Westland, "Sweet Ice" had over 100 amateur bouts, including an undefeated run during his service in the United States Marine Corps. He compiled a professional record of 11-0 (4 knockouts) before retiring in 1996. After hanging up his gloves, Styers opened a local staffing company that would eventually grow into a national powerhouse, generating tens of millions in annual sales. He excelled in business during the next two decades but remained connected to boxing. In fact, Styers was appointed by a former Michigan governor to serve as commissioner of the state's athletic commission, which he did for a total of eight years.

In 2015, around the same time Steward-Williams started up the new Kronk, Styers opened the Norwayne Boxing Gym in his hometown, located about 20 miles west of Detroit. He had a unique vision for the facility.

"I started the gym to help at-risk kids glean the same lessons from boxing that I did," Styers said. "I also wanted to create a more formalized youth development program through tutoring and mentoring."

The focus at Norwayne would be on children ages 8 to 18, with education and personal development being the main priority, followed by formal boxing training.

"We have what we call the four corners of achievement: academics, athletics, leadership and community. There are some unique caveats to the program. If you're part of it, you have to give back to the community once a week. Our kids are feeding the poor at soup kitchens, they're ringing Salvation Army bells, and they're cutting grass and shoveling snow for senior citizens."

Currently, 100 percent of the kids enrolled in Styers' program come from either a single- or no-parent home, and 96 percent of them are on a free lunch program at school. The goal at Norwayne is for every member of the program to eventually go on to college, trade school or the military.

"We bring them in, we teach them to be better people, teach them how to fight, help them academically

Young amateurs spar surrounded by the classic Kronk colors.

and help launch them into success as adults," added Styers. "We had two boxers fight at the 2021 USA Boxing National Championships in Louisiana. At the same time, we had two kids graduate the program last year. Currently, one is in college and the other is in trade school."

Styers met Sylvia and Marie Steward, Emanuel's widow, at Steward's memorial service in 2012. The three of them kept in touch over the years as they ran their gyms. When they bumped into each other at local shows, Marie would always tell Jeff that he and Sylvia should partner up. He didn't pay it much attention at first but eventually began to consider it.

"About a year ago, Sylvia, Marie and I started meeting on Saturday mornings at my gym and started talking about the idea of me buying Kronk," he said. "I told Sylvia that I would never buy Kronk unless she was along for the ride, because I think that Kronk should always have a Steward family member on the team."

For Sylvia, it was a no-brainer.

"With his youth program, Jeff was really the answer to our prayers," she said. "I had been approached by plenty of people who wanted to buy Kronk, but none of them brought the educational element that we wanted.

"I knew that if we merged, with Kronk's rich history and community and Jeff's youth development program, the kids would really soar."

Jeff and Sylvia got right to work, quickly striking an agreement. As they waited for the deal to finalize this fall, the Michigan Golden Gloves approached. A large storm flooded the Kronk gym, so Jeff invited the fighters to begin training at Norwayne. "It was a great way for the two gyms to unofficially integrate," he told Ring.

Right away, Sylvia noticed the impact on her fighters. "If you come to the gym now, you'll see the kids boxing, but you'll actually see them in a classroom learning as well."

Sylvia Steward-Williams alongside Jeff Styers.

Added John Lepak: "These kids come into the gym, and they can't just start boxing. They have to meet with a mentor first, somebody with a tremendous resume of success in the private sector. Then they go into the tutoring program, where their homework and grades are monitored. Only then do they get to graduate to the boxing side of things.

"I think it's beautiful that we have the Kronk history, the Kronk community, which is globally known, but now Jeff is coming on board and he's bringing in a whole new community of people."

It all began with a letter that Styers wrote back in 1984. "I was a senior in high school," he said. "I wrote a letter to Mike Ilitch (former owner of the Detroit Red Wings and Detroit Tigers). I thought it was important that the Ilitch family know who I was and that I was going to be the lightweight champion of the world. Mike forwarded that letter to Emanuel, and he wrote a letter back to me. But it wasn't on Kronk letterhead; it was on ESCOT letterhead."

John Lepak poses with Thomas "The Hitman" Hearns.

Steward's letter made a lasting impression, and Jeff never forgot the meaning of the ESCOT acronym on the letterhead. In fact, he still has the letter to this day.

"It was those same principles that I used to develop my youth program," he said. "And now that we're Kronk, going forward, our program will officially be known as ESCOT."

Although Kronk's youth development initiative is in full swing and the amateur program is doing well, the real hard work has only just begun. Funding is a major issue, as is transportation. At present, there are six volunteers serving as tutors. A driver picks up the kids in a transit van and brings them to the gym every day. Plans are in motion to buy a large passenger bus. The kids in the program are never charged a dollar for anything, including travel, food and equipment costs.

That money has to come from somewhere.

"There's still a lot of heavy lifting to be done," said Styers. "Right now, my main job is to evangelize the Kronk name. I need to be out there talking to donors and community leaders. I feel that the Kronk brand can serve a major role in funding ESCOT.

"There are four legs to this stool: the youth development program, the amateur program, our professional fighter program, which is a work in progress, and the Kronk brand. I feel such a sense of responsibility to the Steward family and to the Kronk name. Obviously we want to do good for the kids, but we also want to put the Kronk brand on a bigger stage. We're looking at getting a store at the airport and how we can work with the sports stadiums here in town."

According to Styers, the ultimate goal is to have Kronk locations in 10 different cities within the next five years. And, of course, ESCOT will be the foundation of each gym.

"Not everyone will be a world champion," he noted. "These kids need a career after boxing."

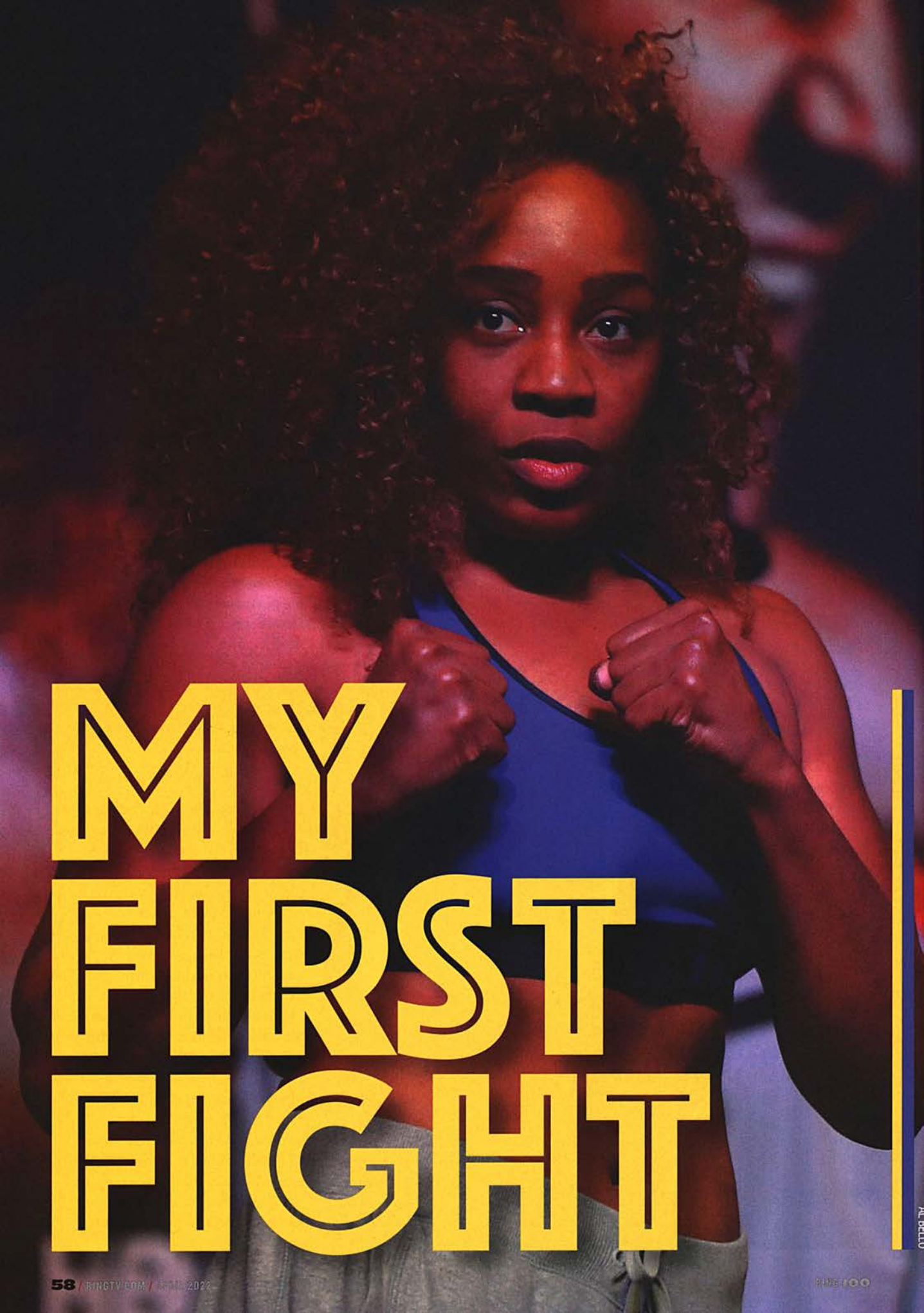
Fans remember the old Kronk fighters for their exploits in the ring, but it was ESCOT principles that led them to further success well beyond their fighting days. Former WBC welterweight titleholder Milton McCrory went on to have a 31-year career with Chrysler. Former IBF lightweight champion Jimmy Paul invested in real estate with his boxing earnings and still owns dozens of rental properties to this day. Former WBA lightweight champion Hilmer Kenty (Steward's first world champ) went on to become a very successful businessman in the Detroit area. The list goes on from there.

That is the true soul of Emanuel Steward's legacy. That is the true meaning of ESCOT.

Michael Montero can be found on social media via @MonteroOnBoxing. His show "The Neutral Corner" can be seen every Monday on TheRingDigital YouTube channel, and heard on audio podcast platforms around the world.

The legendary Emanuel Steward himself works out at the old gym.

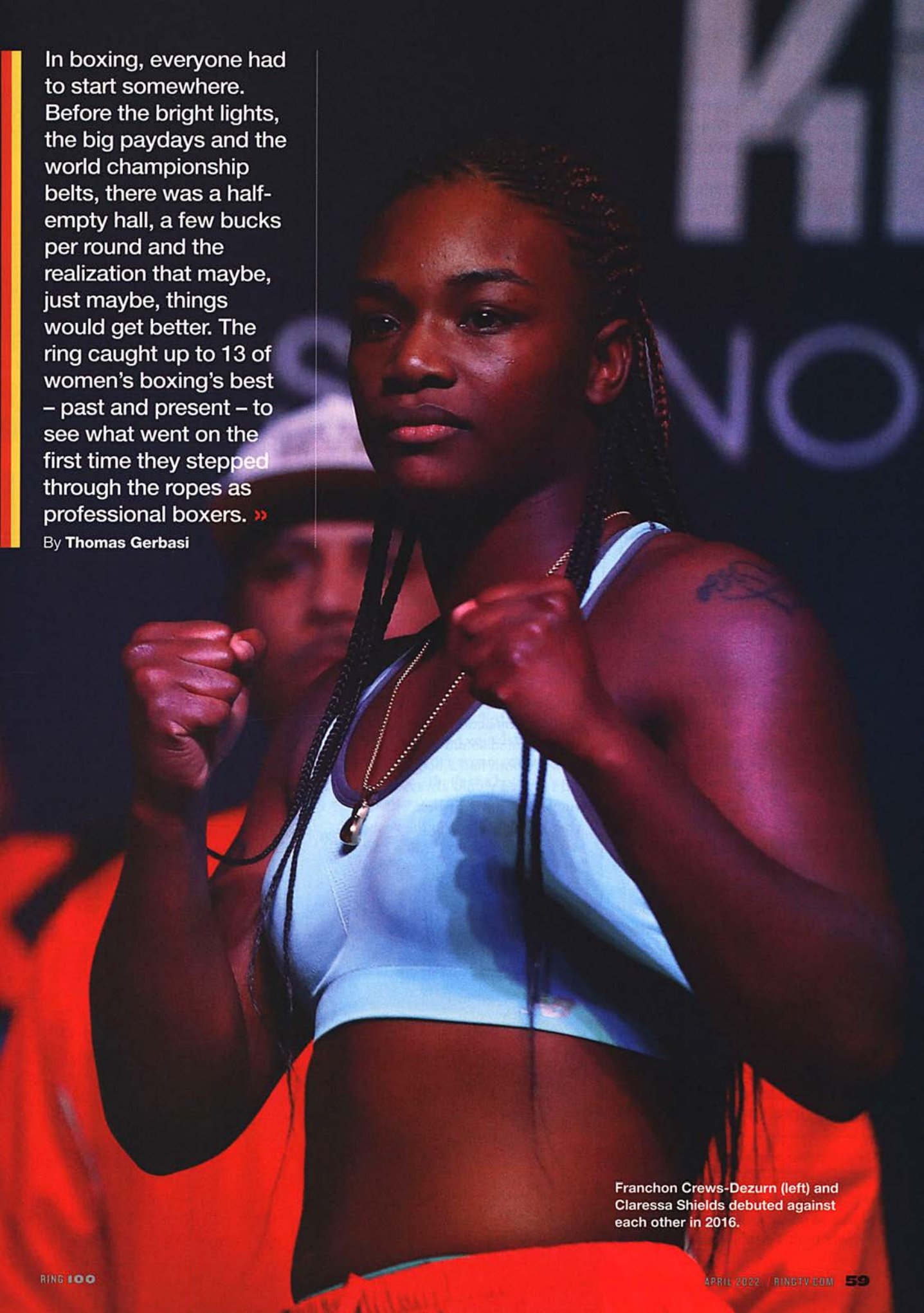
THE RING MAGAZINE



MY FIRST FIGHT

In boxing, everyone had to start somewhere. Before the bright lights, the big paydays and the world championship belts, there was a half-empty hall, a few bucks per round and the realization that maybe, just maybe, things would get better. The ring caught up to 13 of women's boxing's best – past and present – to see what went on the first time they stepped through the ropes as professional boxers. »

By **Thomas Gerbasi**



Franchon Crews-Dezurn (left) and Claressa Shields debuted against each other in 2016.

KIM CLAVEL

The Ring's 2020 Prospect of the Year • December 16, 2017 – W UD 4 Yoseline Martinez Jose

"My first professional fight was on the Billy Joe Saunders-David Lemieux fight card. I was impressed, and I walked towards the ring with a beautiful naiveté because at that moment I thought I knew everything about pro boxing. Today, I realize that I knew nothing about it. But it was beautiful, it was true, it was my dream, and it continues today. Four years later, my first walk to the ring will turn into a world championship walk on March 11, 2022. It's crazy how such a naive walk can turn into something big."

KATHY COLLINS

Former world champion, member of the International Women's Boxing Hall of Fame • August 28, 1995 – W UD 4 Laurie Bishoff

"My first pro fight was an awesome experience, which I admit was not the norm for the time. The pay was minimal – the basic $400 per round – and I fought at the Westbury Music Fair, a 3,000-seat arena on Long Island. We stole the show, the fans were awesome and Dennis Rappaport, the promoter, put me back in that venue several times over the next few years until I sold it out as a headline champion myself a few years later. That theater was in the round and very cool for boxing. New York fans are just the best creatures ever, so I always felt the love!"

FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN

WBC/WBO super middleweight titleholder • November 19, 2016 – L UD 4 Claressa Shields

"My pro debut was very unconventional for so many reasons. I was to fight a two-time Olympic gold medalist on about two weeks' notice at the newly built T-Mobile Arena in Vegas on the undercard of Andre Ward and Sergey Kovalev. That was a lot to unpack! I believed it was a huge deal for women's boxing, nobody else would step up, and I always believed in myself no matter the adversity I was facing. It was beautiful to share the stage with Shields, as we are both fierce competitors, and I told her on the scale that I was proud of her. I believe we had the fight of the night, because in those four rounds we gave nonstop action. Dave Chappelle enjoyed it and so did many others. I knew we both had a bigger purpose, and I knew I would always be a winner, so I gave my best with what I had. Walking in the venue, I knew there was no turning back, but I didn't want to. It was a new exhilarating feeling that made me love boxing again. My mother died two weeks later, but she did get to see my career come full circle, sort of, by fighting in such a historic bout."

SUE FOX

Pioneer of women's boxing, founder of the International Women's Boxing Hall of Fame • February 12, 1976 – L TKO 3 Theresa Kibby

"My pro debut was a disaster waiting to happen. Being a pioneer boxer, there was no internet or social media to find out about other fighters, so I was a perfect subject for an unscrupulous manager. After training for about four months in a karate school with no official boxing trainer, the manager matched me with a female boxer no one else wanted to fight, Theresa Kibby. He lied to me about her background and the kind of shape she was in. Two days before my fight, I began to read newspaper articles in the local papers about my opponent's background. I quickly found out that Kibby had not been boxing for two years – she had been boxing for over 10 years with her two brothers, who were also professional boxers.

After I got over the shock of this unexpected information, I immediately called my manager to find out why he had not told me the truth. He tried to calm my fears. He then sprang another new piece of information on me. He told me that the fight would be four three-minute rounds, not two-minute rounds as originally agreed upon. I quickly figured out that he was definitely the best man on their team.

The night of my fight, I had hand wraps placed on my hands for the first time, and I had never trained

Christy Martin (right) throwing bombs during her heyday on a Don King undercard.

inside of a boxing ring, so when I fought in my pro debut, that was the first time I ever entered the squared circle, because I was training only on a floor with no ring in a karate school. Needless to say, my pro debut was no "Rocky" story. The only saving grace was I almost accidentally knocked her out with an uppercut in the first round. After that, the fight was all hers. The ref stopped the fight in the third round because I was too stubborn to fall."

HEATHER HARDY

Former world champion • August 2, 2012 – W UD 4 Mikayla Nebel

"My first fight was August 2, 2012, at Roseland Ballroom. I sold about $10,000-$12,000 in tickets for this show, and so many people were excited after everything I did in the amateurs. I had never boxed at an evening show like this. Everyone was so loud and drunk. Unlike the bright amateur shows at local high schools, the lights were dimmed, the music was loud, and I remember walking to the ring thinking, 'What the fuck is wrong with me? Why am I doing this?' (laughs) In the first round, I got knocked down. I remember hearing the ref counting three, four, five, and I was looking around at all these screaming people. I saw my mom, and I remember thinking, 'God damn it, I sold all those tickets ...' And then for the rest of the fight, I beat the shit out of the girl like she was ready to steal my money. That was the first of many wins, and I went on to close the last boxing show ever at Roseland. It became my first home."

NATASHA JONAS

2012 Olympian for Great Britain, current lightweight contender • June 23, 2017 – TKO 1 Monika Antonik

"I hadn't actually boxed for two years, because I had my little girl, and everyone was talking about my age and saying, 'Yeah, she was a good amateur, but does she still got it?' At that particular point, because it's your first fight, all I wanted to do was impress. And for me personally, the amateurs didn't matter, because this wasn't the amateurs. I needed to have a good debut. And I don't know if this is every boxer, but I go into every fight thinking, 'Why do I do this?' And it's that little second as you've just finished your last pads, and they call your name and your music starts – that's the hook. It's a bit more razzmatazz in the pros – you've got a bit more of an entry – and when I saw all that, I was like, 'That's why.' After the fight, I think I was just relieved that I'd won, that I'd got the stoppage, and I knew it was something to build off. That was a good starting place."

CHRISTY MARTIN

International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee • September 9, 1989 – Draw 5 Angela Buchanan

"I was still in college. I drove down to Bristol, Tennessee, and had my first pro fight. It was gonna be a one-and-done. I thought it would be a great story as I got older. You have a party, and you're like, 'Guess what I did one time? I had this professional fight.' And I really thought that was gonna be it. I had never seen a female fight. I had those Toughman contest fights, but as far as knowing or seeing a female fight in a pro situation, I had never even been in a boxing gym. I was doing something that I didn't even know really existed. So there was no minute thought that this is what I want to do for my career, this is what I want to be when I grow up. (laughs) As far as I knew, it truly didn't exist. But the fight ended in a draw, and I thought, 'Wow, that's not a very good story.' Because you don't win or you don't lose. Was I robbed? Are you kidding me? They called me, like, 'Will you come fight the promoter's girl?' I didn't know. I thought you go fight and the winner wins. I didn't know enough to know that I was gonna get screwed. I beat the shit out of her and knocked her down, and I got a draw. So they asked me would I do a rematch with that same girl, and I was like, 'Sure.' And in the rematch, I knocked her out. Right hand, boom, knocked her out, and I was just hooked."

Heather Hardy traveled a long road from her pro debut to world honors at 126 pounds.

LAYLA MCCARTER

Multiple-time world champion • September 23, 1998 – W UD 4 Deshawn Mohammed

"Promoter Moe Smith encouraged me to turn pro on his show at Coeur D'Alene Tribal Casino in Worley, Idaho. I lived in Spokane, Washington, and that's where the guys from our gym fought, such as Frank Vassar, Rick Welliver, Para Draine and Sarah Schmedding. I had attended many fights there, and this was an all-women's show headlined by Theresa Arnold. The co-main event featured Hannah 'The Vegas' Fox. One of her people, Shelley Williams, was kind enough to braid the back of my hair. Her words and demeanor were rather calming. I told the DJ to pick a song, so I walked out to House of Pain's 'Jump Around.' The people loved it and were hyped. I was surrounded by people I knew and many I did not, and I faced Deshawn "Da Bomb" Mohammed, who was 1-0 with 1 KO. I thought she must have power to have stopped someone, so I'd better do my best to box and not get hit. The nerves were there until the first bell, but everything worked as my corner was telling me, and I got the unanimous win."

AMANDA SERRANO

Multiple-division world champion • March 20, 2009 – W MD 4 Jackie Trivilino

"I was definitely the opponent. (laughs) Someone called us from Gleason's Gym and said there's this fight with this girl, Jackie Trivilino, would you take it? I said, 'Sure, why not? You guys have like a hundred girls over there, but I'll take the fight if no one else wants to do it.' I won the Golden Gloves in 2008, and I was like, 'What am I gonna do? I'm not gonna do the Golden Gloves another hundred times.' So I said let's just do it and make a little bit of money. I went in there not thinking at all that I would be where I'm at now. The fight was a four-rounder in the girl's hometown; she was the favorite. She had a lot of amateur fights and won a couple amateur championships, and I only had nine amateur fights. The day before at the weigh-ins, she and her whole team were laughing at me and my sister because we have a tradition where we always polish our toenails red. I thought, 'OK, you'll see tomorrow night.' At the beginning, her fans were cheering her on, but towards the end, the fans were cheering me on, which was an incredible feeling and something to this day I think of and say, 'Wow, that's what started my career.' But they kinda robbed me of a stoppage, because I'm telling you, that girl got demolished. There was one time where I had her against the ropes and I had her knocked out, but the referee didn't stop it. He was too into the fight."

JESSICA MCCASKILL

Undisputed welterweight champion • August 22, 2015 – TKO 2 Tyrea Nichole Duncan

"This is a fight where (manager/trainer) Rick (Ramos) basically had to maneuver some things to just get me on the card. He went all the way just to get

Jessica McCaskill went from her pro debut in Indiana to the undisputed 147-pound championship.

Multi-weight champ Amanda Serrano was the away fighter in her professional debut.

CLARESSA SHIELDS

Two-time Olympic gold medalist for the United States, multi-division world champion • November 19, 2016 – W UD 4 Franchon Crews-Dezurn

"I remember walking out to a song by a Flint rapper named Jon Connor, 'Someone Like Me,' and I came out to that song because he was basically saying in the lyrics there's only one person that's like me. And that was my introduction to the world – Claressa Shields is here to introduce you to women's boxing. When I was in the ring with Franchon, I just knew that she was gonna give me hell and I was gonna give her hell, because we had experienced each other before – we fought four or five times in the amateurs, so I knew that in the pros if she would have beaten me, that would be her big breakout fight. So I wanted to make sure that I went in there and got the decision. We touched gloves, and as soon as the round started, she came out and threw a wide, long right hand. I blocked it, but I knew what her intentions were – she came in there to try and knock me out with 10-ounce gloves and no headgear. (laughs) But that showed that I'll fight anybody. I'm not afraid to take those tough fights. You put somebody in there with me who's good, I'm gonna show you I'm great. Put me in there with somebody who you think is great, I'm gonna show you that I'm phenomenal."

SHELLY VINCENT

Former world title challenger • October 7, 2011 – W UD 4 Karen Dulin

"I remember nerves. I remember so many people coming out that I was shocked. It was a few weeks after I won Nationals and they were trying to convince me to fight for a belt, but I was like, 'No, can I just do things right and take the right steps up the ladder?' I said I need to feel what it's like getting hit in front of all these people and my family and my kid without headgear and with these tiny-ass gloves. (laughs) I was excited to get the headgear off, because I felt like I could see things coming clearer and I was very defensive and slick in my debut year. On fight night, Vinny Paz was there, and I was like, 'Damn, more added pressure,' because I copied him and Mike Tyson off YouTube – that's how I taught myself how to box and that's where the 'Mini-Vinny' came from that he co-signs. But I remember telling myself, 'Shels, you've been through so much worse things than this; this is nothing near death, drugs, violence, rape. You're good. This controlled chaos is home to you, now go dance. You beat everything else that should have destroyed you. Have fun, dance, and show your mother what she made and make her proud.'"

KALIESHA WEST

Former world champion • February 23, 2006 – W UD 4 Suzannah Warner

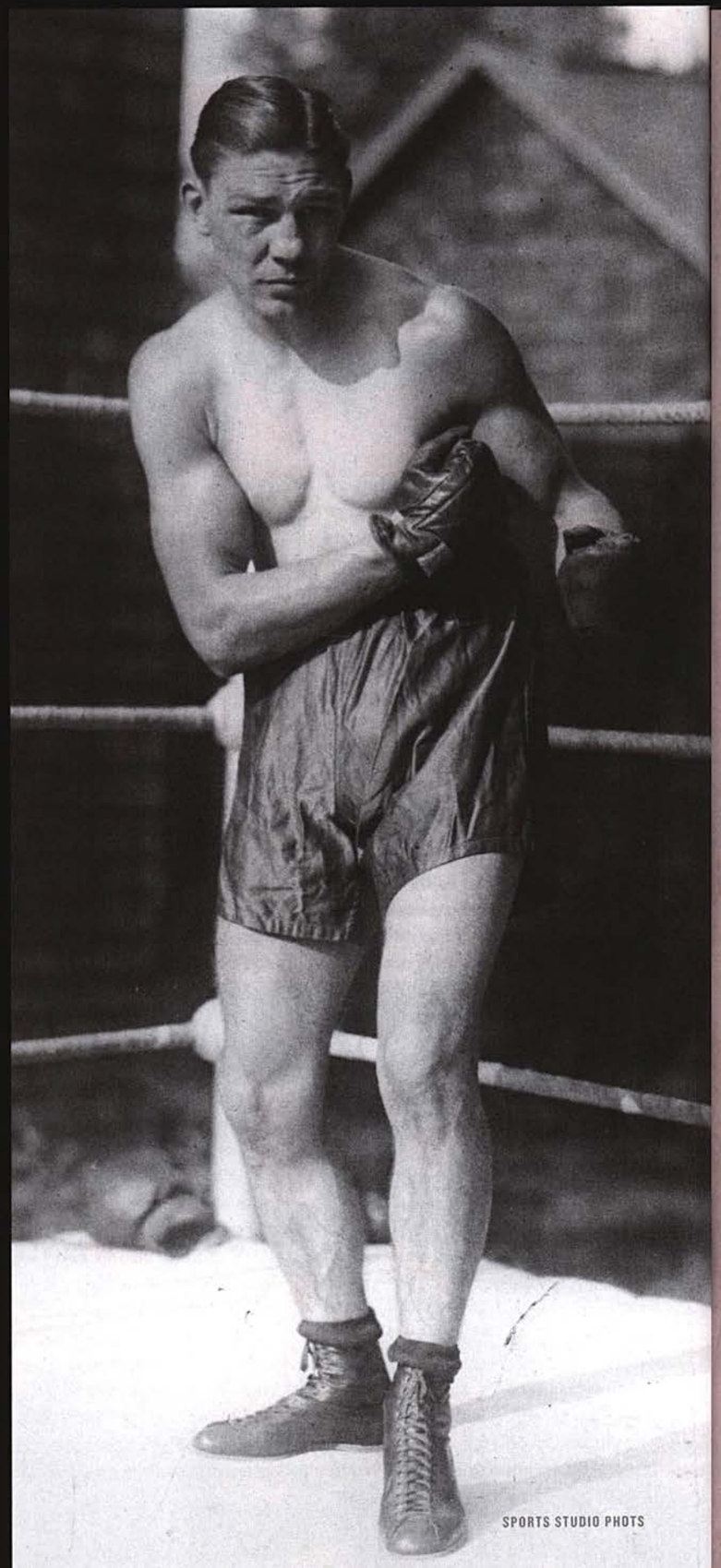
"I always told myself I'm nowhere near the finish line. From the very first pro fight. I treated my debut like it was make or break. Along with the rest of my fights, I'd literally tell myself that second place is the first loser. That's something my grandma taught the family. And I'd say it helped me hold myself accountable to the outcome. My dad was nervous as hell because Warner was a very tough amateur standout with multiple championships. But it goes to show the amateurs don't mean shit when you turn pro. She was tough, but I was tougher. Plus, without that pillow on your head, that ass dropped – in the first minute of the first round. But kudos to her for getting back up. The one thing that stood out most was how packed it was. Security was bringing in extra seats, and my second-grade teacher was there! Patrick Ortiz did such a great job promoting me, and the crowd roared. I felt like I was at the Staples Center in that room. That was another reason why I fought my heart out, because of the crowd. They had my adrenaline so high, it was a blur. I just remember going crazy and not considering stamina, nothing. I was just a little ol' 'Wild Wild West' living her dream."

HARRY GREB vs. STANLEY KETCHEL

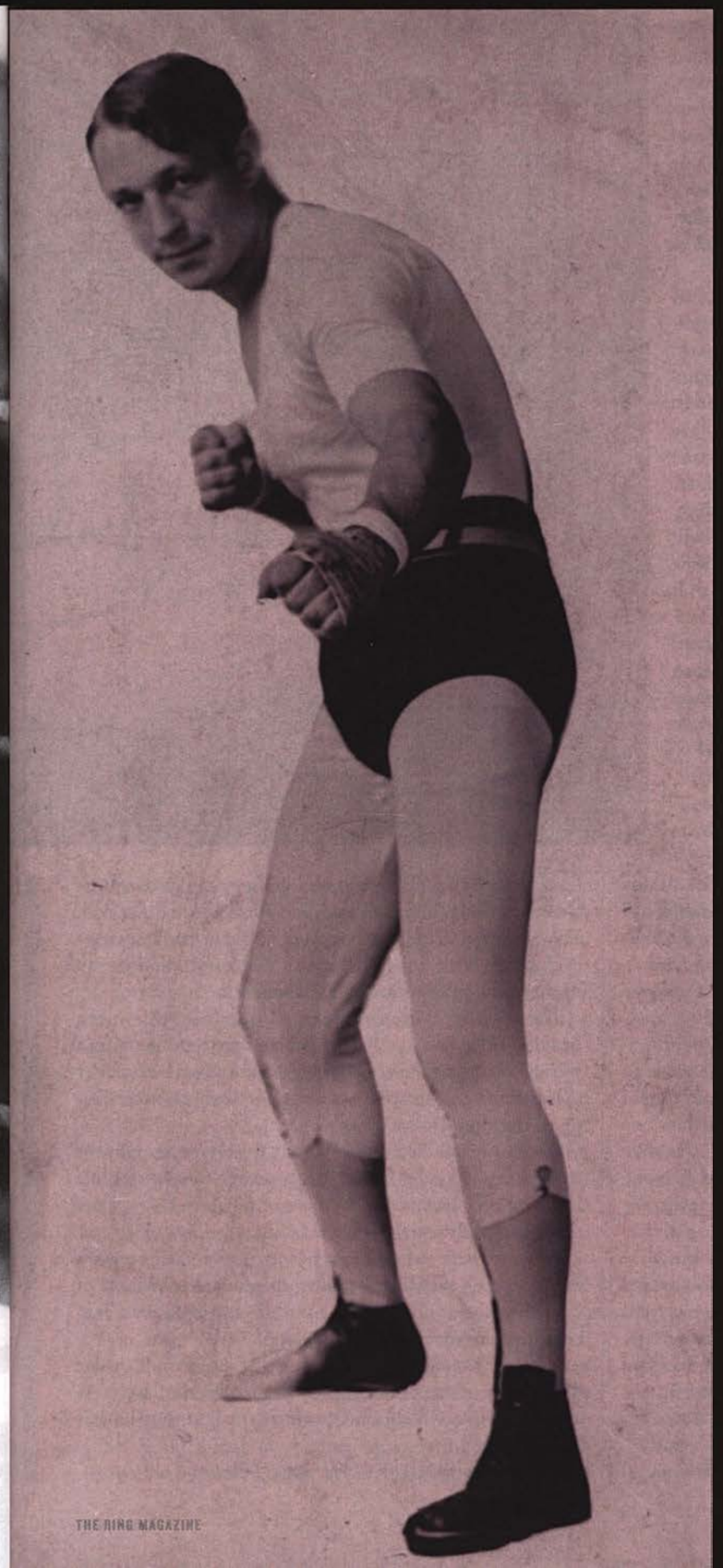
A FANTASY FIGHT FOR THE UNDISPUTED MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

By **Ron Lipton**

Veteran referee and historian Ron Lipton, a former amateur boxer who was inducted into the New York and New Jersey boxing halls of fame, is proud to present the fifth installment of his mythical matchup series for The Ring.



SPORTS STUDIO PHOTS



THE RING MAGAZINE

FIGHTER BACKGROUNDS:

Harry Greb (born Edward Henry Greb)

Fighting moniker: "The Pittsburgh Windmill"

Titles held: World middleweight title (1923-1926), American light heavyweight title

Born: June 6, 1894

Died: Oct. 22, 1926 (Age 32)

Height: 5-foot-8

Reach: 71 inches

Record: 108-8-3 (49 KOs) (as per BoxRec.com; other sources for Greb list over a hundred "newspaper decisions" that are not included here.)

Notes: Greb was only stopped twice during his career – vs. Kid Graves when he suffered a broken arm in Round 2 and a second-round KO to Joe Chip in his eighth pro bout. (Greb weighed 142 pounds to Chip's 156.)

Greb turned pro at welterweight but soon fought his way up through light heavyweight, weighing in at his heaviest at 178 pounds vs. Tommy Robson and Billy Miske. Most of his fights were at middleweight.

He holds the only professional victory over legendary heavyweight champion Gene Tunney, plus wins over light heavyweight hall of famers Jack Dillon, Maxie Rosenbloom, Tommy Loughran, Battling Levinsky, and Jimmy Slattery.

Greb beat Jack Dempsey opponents Bill Brennan, Billy Miske, Tommy Gibbons and Willie Meehan, and scored wins over middleweight champions Mickey Walker, Johnny Wilson and George Chip. He often claimed that he was willing to fight "Anybody, any size, anytime, anywhere" as often as they wanted to. He was one of the few white champions of his era who would cross the "color line," and hall of famers Tiger Flowers and Kid Norfolk are among the Black fighters he faced. (Note: Several of Greb's aforementioned victories were newspaper decisions.)

Stanley Ketchel (born Stanislaw Kiecal)

Fighting moniker: "The Michigan Assassin"

Titles held: Two-time world middleweight (1908, 1908-1910)

Born: Sept. 14, 1886

Died: Oct. 15, 1910 (Age 24, after being shot by jealous Missouri farmhand Walter Dipley)

Height: 5-foot-9

Reach: 70 inches

Record: 49-5-3 (46 KOs) (as per BoxRec.com)

Notes: A ferocious puncher with limitless stamina, Ketchel was a career middleweight who weighed in at his heaviest (170¼ pounds) when he challenged Jack Johnson for the heavyweight championship.

Ketchel stopped almost everyone who shared the ring with him. Among his most notable victories are fellow middleweight champ Billy Papke, light heavyweight champ Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, Mike "Twin" Sullivan, Jack "Twin" Sullivan and Joe Thomas (whom he stopped in a 32-round slugfest). Ketchel lost a close six-round decision to the great Sam Langford and managed to drop Johnson with a right hand before being knocked out. (In both mixed-race bouts, Langford and Johnson claimed they had the "handcuffs on" to carry Ketchel unless forced to knock him out.)

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I am going to match Greb and Ketchel for the undisputed middleweight championship – to be held at the Mecca of Boxing, Madison Square Garden, as all of my mythical matchups have – but this one will be a little different. Unlike my previous mythical matchups, in which I imagined the fighters at their athletic peaks (usually after their career-best wins), for Greb vs. Ketchel I have matched them after the sum total of their entire careers with all the knowledge and experience they both amassed.

Both champions will be in their best shape, but they'll bring everything they learned during their legendary careers into this fight.

Greb and Ketchel were fistic diamonds of grit and tenacity with a "take-on-all-comers" commitment to boxing that is rarely seen today. Their legacies have endured, as evidenced by the passionate support both receive from their current-day fans, whose online and social-media arguments are never ending. The outcome of this mythical matchup feature will no doubt add to those fever-pitched debates. Like Angelo Dundee once said, "I love controversy." It only adds to the story.

But remember, this mythical matchup is designed for your enjoyment. As always, I'll share it the way I see it unfolding with a stretch of poetic license, placing boxing figures from different eras into the story.

PRE-FIGHT EVENTS:

Each fighter cooperated in the publicity tours demanded of them.

Greb trained in Pittsburgh to the delight of his hometown fans while Ketchel first toured his old barnstorming haunts in Montana to get his rough-and-tumble mindset back, but most of his training was in California, followed by a return to Grand Rapids for the final days of camp.

Prior to the weigh-in, Greb was privately brought into a room for his physical. His trainers took great pains to furtively obtain a copy of the eye chart beforehand so that Harry could memorize it. How they pulled it off, no one knows. But everyone in boxing wanted the fight to take place, and like Joe Frazier, Gypsy Joe Harris and so many others before them, Greb found a way to compete against the best with one good eye.

Later, Greb and Ketchel sat at a table with the New York State boxing commissioner between them and several uniformed police officers behind them. It was a final chance for the press to speak with both combatants after they had just weighed in on worldwide TV. Greb weighed in at 160 pounds even and Ketchel came in at 159¾.

The referee for the fight is Larry Hazzard Sr., chosen for his old-school strict enforcement of the rules.

At the pre-fight meeting, both men were sternly warned that no fouling will be tolerated and any violation of the rules will be strictly enforced, including disqualification. They listened to Hazzard in grim silence while staring at each other with unbridled malevolence – both wishing they could fight then and there unrestrained.

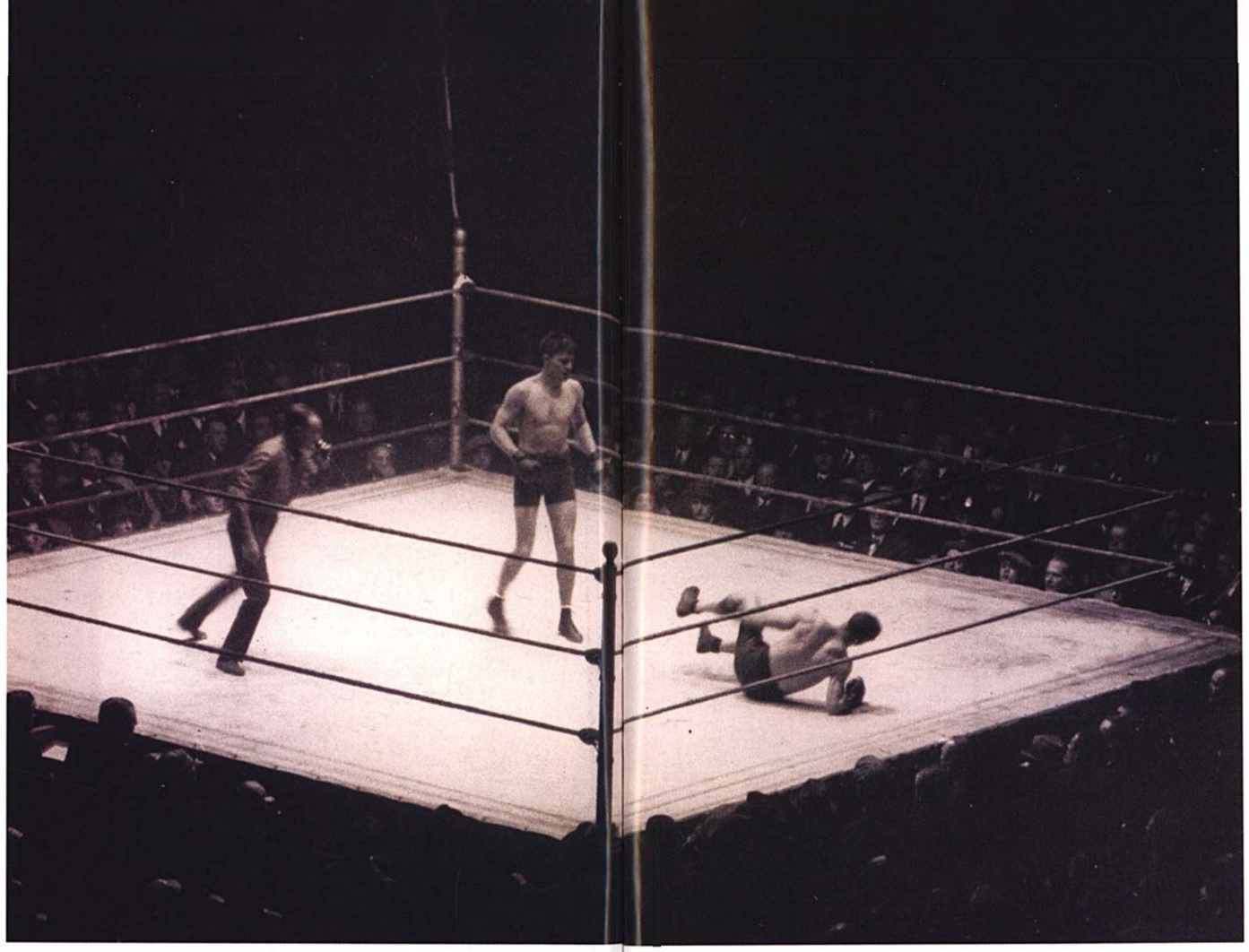
The photographers clamored for a face-off, so the promoter relented and brought them together. This was a bad mistake, and someone should have known better after the scathing and vitriolic exchanges between them leading up to this moment.

Greb's rugged face was a Mount Rushmore monument to the near-300 fights he'd had against the toughest people in the world. It was not the face of a battered loser but that of a battle-scarred king of beasts.

His eyes were slits, glaring fiercely at Ketchel, yet with an unnerving, taunting facial expression and a twinkle of confidence that could only come from a man who had conquered so many great warriors.

Ketchel was another story. It was there for all to see. This was a man who existed on the verge of hysteria and explosive violence without any warning if he felt challenged.

Greb was a fighter; Ketchel was a killer.



SPORT STUDIO PHOTOS

Gene Tunney (standing) used a body attack to outpoint Greb in their third fight.

His dangerous mood swings were up in the trees, either ultra-violent or deathly quiet. He had loyal friends who said he always felt bad when he hurt you and once cried after shooting a friend in the foot in anger.

Now his dark side was on display. Greb's staredown infuriated him, as if Greb was amused by it all and looked down on him as a lesser being.

The tension in the room at that moment had a life of its own. Ketchel had made comments in the press that upset Greb, who was usually amiable and good-natured but not one to be trifled with.

Greb's beloved wife, Mildred, sat in the first row of the audience for the weigh-in. She was still seething at the attempts Ketchel made to wink at her and flirt with her to purposely anger her husband.

Both men radiated bristling energy now that they were in close proximity with each other.

The trouble had started in a previous press conference when Ketchel said Greb would be nothing if the referees had done their job and disqualified him for his flagrant fouling in every single fight he ever had.

"If he does that shit to me, he is getting it right back in spades – thumbs, elbows, heeling and low blows, the works. He can't punch worth a damn; he just throws a lot of pillow punches, which is a joke to me."

Greb countered: "You couldn't carry the spit bucket for the guys I beat. All you ever did was beat a couple of guys who never deserved to be in the ring with me.

"Papke beat the living shit out of you, and you beat blown-up welterweights and guys who you knew had no chance against you. The only time you fought anybody was Langford and Johnson, and you had to beg them to carry you. Even Jack O'Brien was beating you until you finally lucked up and got him.

"When I get you in the ring, you will wish you were never born."

The comments from both of them had fermented and seeped into the internal wells that gave them their fire.

Ketchel chest-bumped Greb and then pushed his nose right into Greb's face. Greb took a half step back and slapped Ketchel.

A sound came from deep within Ketchel's belly; it was a half-shrieking scream and a growl combined as he went ballistic, lunging toward Greb – not to punch him but to rip him apart with his bare hands.

Greb spun to the side and got off two lightning-fast, closed-fisted right hands; one landed on Ketchel's cheek, the other on his shoulder.

Managers, trainers and police were instantly all over the fighters, pulling them apart.

Ketchel wildly jumped up and down as he struggled to shake loose and break free from the officers and the commission inspectors holding him back.

Ketchel turned to his cornermen, trainer Jimmy DeForest and manager Tom O'Rourke, and under his breath he snarled: "I'm going to blow the fucking whistle on the bullshit eye exam they gave him."

DeForest and O'Rourke spoke to Ketchel in hushed, desperate whispers immediately.

"Steve, shut the fuck up right now," a panicky DeForest hissed in Ketchel's ear as he chewed on his cigar. "Do you want the fight canceled here on the spot and no one gets paid? Is that what you want? We'll get him in the ring. For Christ's sake, stop or we will all get arrested here."

With the blood turning his face purple with rage, Ketchel did not say another word and was led away by his team as order was finally restored.

The hardcore boxing writers who had seen it all were shaken from the spectacle of potential mayhem they'd just witnessed. It was beyond exciting. It was chilling, dangerous and ugly.

Both fighters were fined by the commission for unsportsmanlike conduct and left the room.

What the boxing writers collectively agreed upon was that Greb remained cool as ice during the encounter and calmly left with his wife and co-managers, George Engel and James "Red" Mason.

FIGHT NIGHT:

Madison Square Garden is sold out and packed wall-to-wall with celebrities, champions and rabid fight fans in nerve-wracking anticipation of a violent grudge fight between the two immortal champions.

With the prelims out of the way, the lights dim and then burst forth with a laser light show that ends with the spotlight focused on one aisle, where Stanley Ketchel emerges, bounding down the path to the ring wearing a black sweater. He's led by a tall man whose head is down and obscured. DeForest, O'Rourke and cutman Jacob "Stitch" Duran bring up the slack.

The tall man holds the ropes open for Ketchel. And beyond all belief, it is Jack Johnson.

Ketchel waves to the screaming throngs and shadowboxes furiously. The crowd goes crazy seeing Johnson in the corner of the man he fought. They were friends before and it's good to see them as friends now.

Now here comes Greb and his cornermen. Leading the way is Mason, Engel and cutman Al Gavin. Last in line is Greb himself, and now we can see he has his boxing gloves on the shoulders of Jack Dempsey as they jog toward the ring.

The entire Garden is in an uproar as the legends are gloriously showcased in the ring: Greb, Ketchel, Johnson and Dempsey.

The spotlight goes to ring announcer David Diamante, who screams it out to the crowd with style as other iconic champions line up outside of the ring to be introduced. He calls Johnson to the middle of the ring; Dempsey is next and the crowd is going crazy; now it is Gene Tunney entering the ring; Sam Langford is next, followed by Joe Gans and Mickey Walker.

The champion introductions are over.

"Ladies and gentlemen, and fight fans around the world, are you ready? THE FIGHT STARTS NOW!

"Twelve rounds of boxing scheduled for the undisputed middleweight championship of the world.

"The three judges scoring this fight are John McKaie and Harold Lederman from New York and Steve Weisfeld from New Jersey. The man in charge is championship veteran Larry Hazzard Sr.

"Introducing first, fighting out of the red corner, wearing the purple trunks with the red, white and blue belt with white stars, he scaled 159¾ pounds. His professional record is an outstanding one: 49 victories, five losses and three draws with 46 wins coming by way of knockout. The reigning WBC, WBA, WBO middleweight champion of the world, from Grand Rapids, Michigan, heralded as one of the hardest-punching middleweight champions in boxing history, The Michigan Assassin, STANLEY KETCHEL! ... KETCHEL!"

Thunderous applause rocks the Garden.

"And his opponent, fighting out of the blue corner, wearing the all-blue trunks with a blue sash, he scaled 160 pounds, bang on. His professional record, an astounding one: 261 wins, over the elite of the middleweight, light heavyweight and heavyweight divisions, 17 losses, 20 draws, with 49 wins coming by knockout, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, considered one of the greatest fighters and middleweight champions of all time, the Ring Magazine and IBF middleweight champion of the world, The Pittsburgh Windmill, HARRY GREB! ... GREB!"

A powerful crescendo of overwhelming applause and cheering for Greb ensues.

Hazzard calls them to the center of the ring: "Chief seconds and fighters only.

"You have been given the rules of the New York State Athletic Commission. You have both been told that absolutely no intentional fouls will be tolerated, at the risk of disqualification. Protect yourselves at all times and obey my commands at all times. Touch gloves and good luck to you both."

As they go back to their corners, Al Bernstein, part of the Showtime broadcast booth, says: "Leading up to this fight, I keep hearing two things. One is that Ketchel is such a hard puncher that he will KO Greb. The other thing is that Greb will not be affected by anything Ketchel does and will be too fast, strong and elusive for the puncher, having beaten so many light heavyweights and heavyweights that Dempsey fought. There's the bell."

FIRST ROUND

Ketchel runs across the ring throwing bombs from waist level – long, looping punches – in an attempt to force Greb to the ropes. He is met with a fusillade of punches from all angles from Greb; all land to his head. The crowd is already on its collective feet, screaming.

Greb is darting in and out, smothering Ketchel with a whirlwind of punches while getting out of the way so fast that Ketchel is unable to counter him. Ketchel has yet to land a significant punch one minute into the fight.

But the middleweights elect to engage in close midway through the round. They go toe-to-toe in the center of the ring, no clinches. Ketchel digs body shots to Greb's arms, but none get through to his body; all are blocked as Greb weaves under the wild roundhouse shots.

Greb is like lightning, cuffing Ketchel around his gloves to the side of his head, manhandling him to keep him off-balance. Ketchel's face is reddened from the amount of punches he's already absorbed, but also from some of the grappling he is enduring with the underrated defensive wizard on the inside.

Hazzard warns Greb for roughhousing just before the bell.

SCORE: 10-8 FOR GREB. Complete domination and all-around game was demonstrated by The Pittsburgh Windmill: clean punching, effective aggressiveness, defense and ring generalship.

ROUND 2

Ketchel comes out just as fast but more precise in his attack. Greb does not let up and keeps lathering Ketchel's head with blinding speed. Ketchel retaliates with great hand speed too, but his balance is awkward and he tries to clinch too much. Greb pounds him in the clinches. Although Ketchel is listed at 5-foot-9 and Greb at 5-foot-8, Greb looks bigger, broader, taller and stronger in the ring.

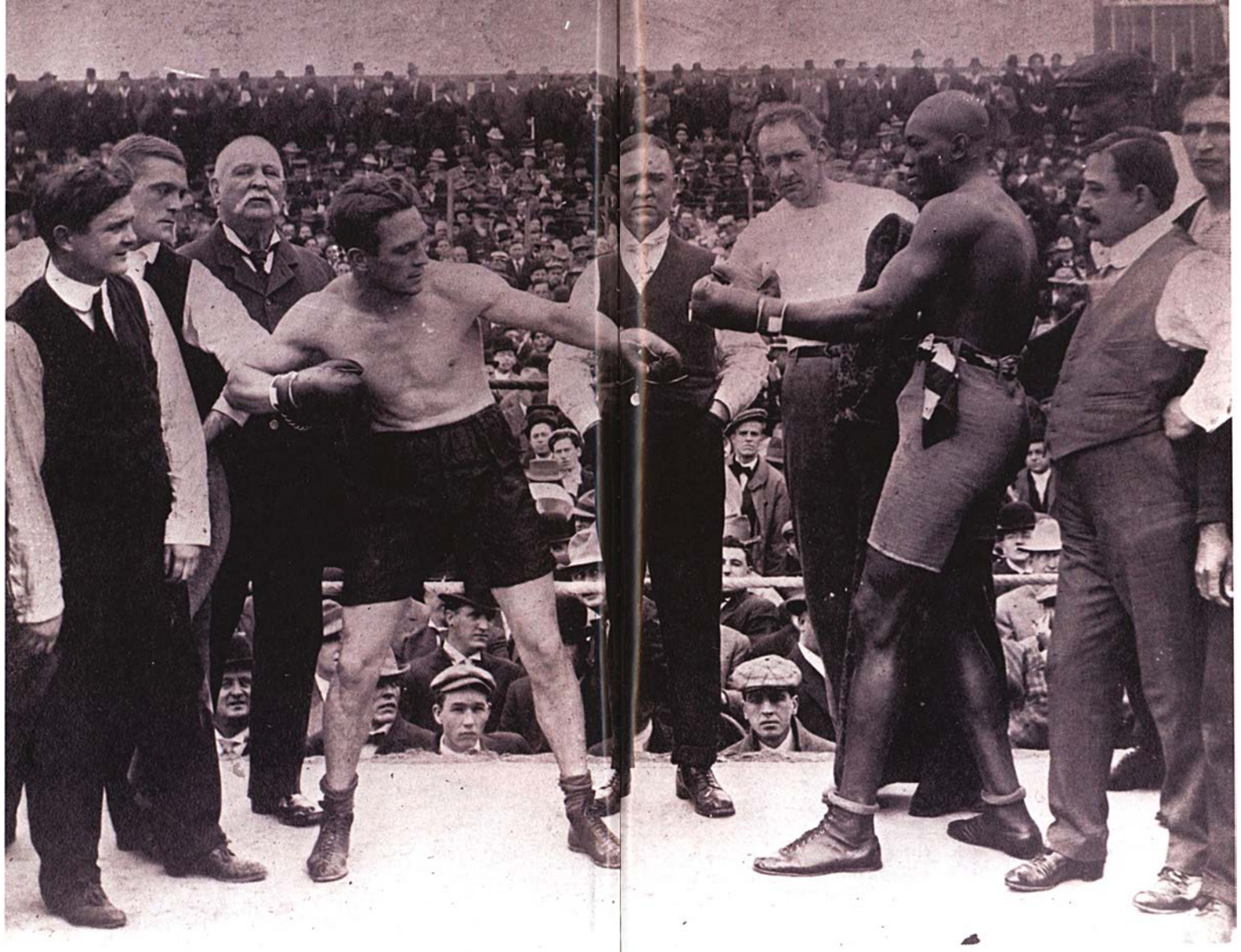
Ketchel has his head down now, crouching low as he presses, and for the first time he gets to Greb's body with some hard shots. Greb shakes them off and retaliates with such an insane volume of punches that the crowd explodes in response. Ketchel catches a head-whipping but takes it all and keeps pounding away at Greb's body. However, the body attack has no visible effect on Greb, who rides the shots out by twisting, turning, going in and out at angles while making Ketchel pay with counters for every shot he throws. The bell rings.

SCORE: 10-9 FOR GREB.

Between rounds, Ketchel's corner reminds him of how he overwhelmed Philadelphia Jack O'Brien late in their 10-round no-decision fight.

The Showtime crew has scored each round for Greb. "Ketchel will not win one round if he doesn't land something big," Bernstein says.

In Greb's corner, James "Red" Mason tells his fighter, "Keep it up, Harry. Do the job on him. He can't hurt you." To which Greb replies: "Yeah? I know something you don't: how hard this guy can punch. He jarred my guts with that last right to the body. I almost threw up."



HARRY GREB VS. STANLEY KETCHEL

Ketchel and heavyweight champion of the world Jack Johnson before their fight in October 1909.

JHU SHERIDAN LIBRARIES/GADO/GETTY IMAGES

ROUND 3

Ketchel comes out of his corner slower than he did for rounds 1 and 2. His face is swollen and red from the constant pounding from Greb, who continues to dart in and out while punching at angles. He nails Ketchel with his first hard body shot, a tremendous right hand behind Stan's left elbow directly to the sweet spot. Ketchel groans out loud; his knees sag. Greb smells blood and rushes in to finish him, but Ketchel sees his opening and explodes a right hand off of his jaw. Greb goes down hard. Hazzard gets Ketchel to a white neutral corner and picks up the count from the A.R.

"THREE, FOUR, FIVE, SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT," Hazzard administers the mandatory eight count to a standing Greb, who got up at the count of "two." He wipes Greb's gloves. "YOU OK, HARRY?"

"Yeah. Hell, yeah," smiles Greb. Ketchel rushes in and is met with the worst series of punches he has taken so far, rocking him back on his heels. The crowd goes insane as the bell rings.

SCORE: 10-8 KETCHEL.

The Ketchel fans with their Michigan Assassin T-shirts are going wild. They chant Ketchel's name, rallying him to come out and finish the job. Jimmy DeForest, who loves Ketchel like a son, says to him: "You hurt him, champ! Keep hurting him." Ketchel responds: "His head is like hitting a rock."

ROUND 4

Ketchel comes out reborn, and this time he heeds the advice of his good friend at ringside, Ozark millionaire R.P. Dickerson, who, along with his manager Wilson Mizner, yells: "Steve, keep your hands up!"

Greb, humiliated at being suckered in like Jack Johnson was, exits his corner reinvented. He is more careful now as he avoids Ketchel's rushes. Every time Ketchel gets close enough to go to the body, Greb punches in flurries and is gone, moving in and out.

Out of frustration, Ketchel hits Greb with a hard low blow then grabs him around the neck and starts pounding him furiously. Greb heels Ketchel's face with an open glove and cracks him expertly with a follow-through elbow after landing a left hook. Hazzard sees it all and calls time.

"Cut this shit out right now, both of you. Keep it clean or I'll take points," Hazzard orders.

"TIME IN!"

They clinch and start pounding away at each other in close. Greb breaks free rather than risk fouling Ketchel, and as the bell rings, both men keep throwing punches until it is sounded five more times. Hazzard breaks them up as the crowd goes wild.

SCORE: 10-9 GREB. It's an evenly contested round, but a slight edge goes to Greb for effective aggressiveness and defense.

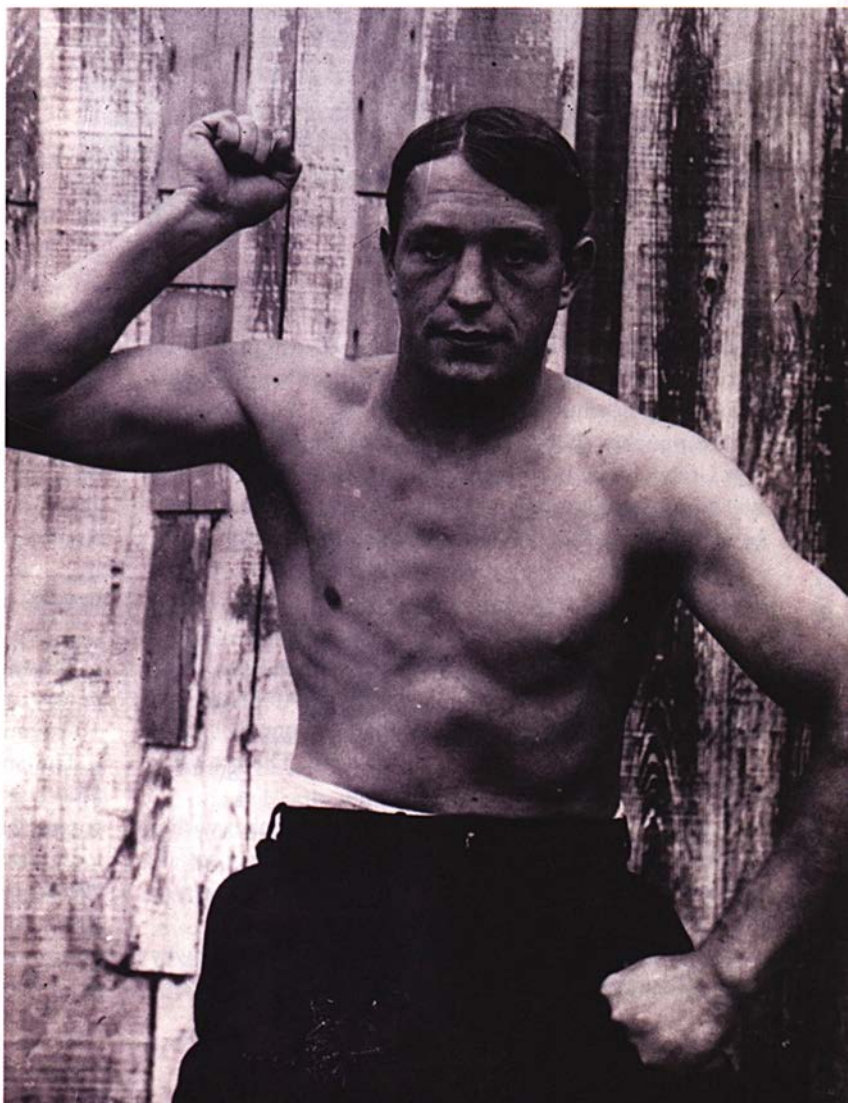
ROUNDS 5-11

Greb steps up the pace and is landing more punches in each round. Ketchel continues to bore forward, trying to clinch and work inside, but Greb, who maintains an uncanny volume of punches round after round, will not allow it. Greb's defense is superb, preventing any damaging punches from Ketchel, who refuses to give up. Neither man tires despite the torrid pace of the fight.

SCORING: GREB WINS EACH ROUND, 10-9, AS THE ACTION FALLS INTO A REPETITIVE PATTERN.

Ketchel's face is now a mask of red and purple bruises as he takes his seat in the corner between rounds. Greb is unmarked as he takes his seat. Neither man is breathing hard.

Greb's corner tells him to keep doing what he has



THE RING MAGAZINE

done and blast Ketchel with combinations every time he comes in. They remind him to crouch as he spins out and to watch for the overhand right. Greb nods affirmatively.

DeForest grabs Ketchel's face in his own hands: "I love you like a son. I know you can do it. Knock this bastard out now, just like Joe Chip did long ago! Give him a beating like Tommy Gibbons did in Forbes Field. He can be had, just fucking do it like he insulted your mother!" Ketchel smiles at him through his bloodstained mouthpiece.

ROUND 12

Ketchel comes out with all he has left. Memories of everything he ever went through in Montana – fighting his way up the ladder against all comers, every street fight, every barroom brawl, come-from-behind fights against Papke and O'Brien, his 32nd-round KO of Joe Thomas – flash through his mind in a millisecond.

He throws punches like a maniac – hard, fast punches. Greb retaliates with his usual array of windmill punches, but this time he does not get out of the way fast enough. Ketchel is all over his body, digging in debilitating shots. As Greb pulls back, Ketchel nails him with a dynamite overhand right, a much harder punch than he hit Johnson or O'Brien with, and this time it lands cleanly to the temple with devastating effect, knocking a spray of water from Greb's head. The explosive sound of the punch is heard throughout the Garden.

Greb stumbles in a delayed reaction and his legs give out as he crumbles to the canvas.

Ketchel runs to the neutral corner as Hazzard reaches "eight" over Greb, whose head clears as his powerful legs get him up to do battle. Ketchel rushes in to finish the job, and The Pittsburgh Windmill and The Michigan Assassin are blazing back at each other at the bell.

SCORE: 10-8 KETCHEL.

The Garden crowd is on its feet, stomping, clapping, screaming and cheering.

The fighters return to their respective corners to await the decision.

Diamante bellows:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have the scoring of the three judges! All three judges have the same score: 116-109. Your winner by unanimous decision AND THE NEW UNDISPUTED MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPION OF THE WORLD, HARRY GREB! ... GREB!

There are mixed cheers and some boos. The Showtime crew feels it is a just decision but might have been a little bit closer.

Ketchel and Greb hug each other in the middle of the ring as Hazzard holds up Greb's hand for photos.

Brian Custer asks each man what is next for them. Greb replies: "I'll be honest with you: I hate hospitals, but I have some damages that need attention. After my operation, I will be back in the ring in force."

Brian continues: "Harry, they are going to write books about you. The fans adore you."

Greb: "I appreciate the fans, and if someone wants to write a book then they have to talk to me personally, not guess at what I am like. But what you see is what you get and, honestly, what I really care about is what the fighters think of me, because we share something no one else can."

Custer calls Ketchel over.

"Stanley, how do you feel about the fight?"

Ketchel replies: "If they made it for 20 rounds or longer, I would have gotten him out of there, but tonight he won fair and square. He is the fastest fighter I ever fought, almost impossible to hit him the way you want to.

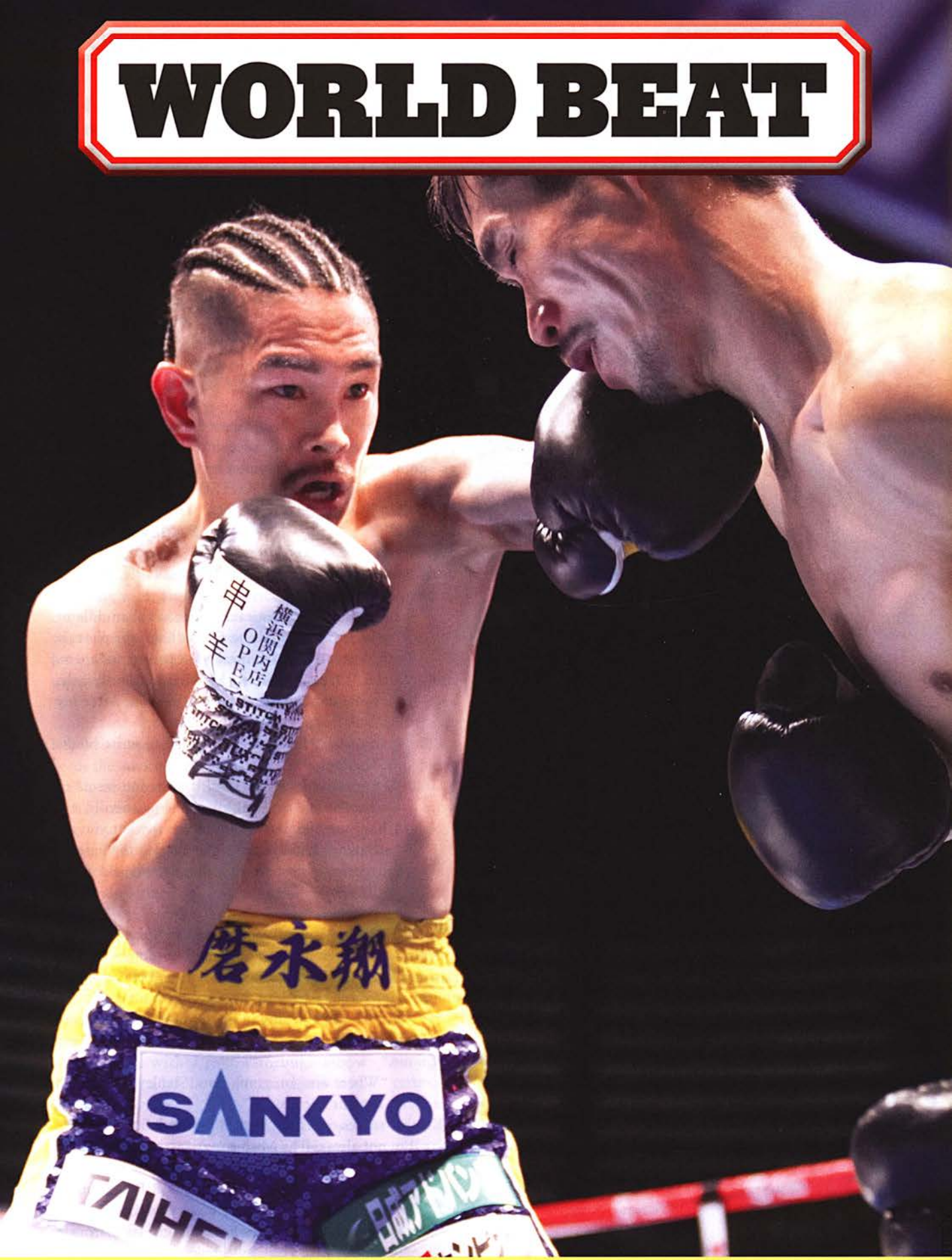
"He gave me some licking in there tonight, but I wasn't hurt and just started to get going. I never quit. You have to kill me."

Custer: "Where are you going now, Stanley? Can I call you Steve, as your friends do?"

Ketchel smiles and puts his arm around Custer, "Sure, Brian. I'm not always The Michigan Assassin. Some people actually think I am a good friend. And speaking of friends, see that guy sitting ringside, his name is R.P. Dickerson and he has a beautiful ranch in Conway, Missouri. I am going there to rest up after this fight and get away from it all. Great talking with you and thanks to all my fans for supporting me."

TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY

WORLD BEAT



JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

It's become a tradition for Kazuto Ioka to give Japanese boxing fans a big show on New Year's Eve. He's done it almost every year since he defended his WBC strawweight title with a first-round stoppage of Yodgoen CP Freshmart (aka Veerawut Yuthimitr) in 2011. The only year he skipped a New Year's Eve show was in 2017, when he announced his retirement (which only lasted 17 months).

The Ring's No. 3-rated junior bantamweight and WBO titleholder was scheduled to battle IBF beltholder Jerwin Ancajas this past New Year's Eve at the Ota-City General Gymnasium in Tokyo, but the anticipated unification bout was canceled a week after it was announced (in November), as the worldwide surge of the COVID Omicron variant spurred the Japanese government to impose another ban on new entrants from other countries.

Ioka still wanted to defend his belt, but it looked like his 10th New Year's Eve headliner would be canceled. Then, a domestic contender, Ryoji Fukunaga, honorably accepted the urgent offer to challenge the four-division titleholder on less than three weeks' notice.

Fukunaga – who had collected national, OPBF and WBO Asian Pacific 115-pound titles during a five-bout win streak coming into the Ioka fight – was an unlikely world title challenger at age 35 (and having started boxing at 25), but he fully embraced the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The hastily built match did not disappoint spectators, thanks to the determination of the challenger and the intelligence of the champion. Brave Fukunaga (15-5, 14 KOs), with his nose bleeding from the seventh round on, kept up a courageous attack highlighted by solid lefts to the body. However, Ioka (28-2, 15 KOs) handled anything the tall, heavy-handed southpaw could dish out with his superior skillset and incomparable experience. Ioka set a national record with the hotly contested unanimous decision victory (by scores of 115-113, 116-112 and 118-110), as it was his 21st world title bout.

"There is no easy fight," Ioka said afterward. "I learn something every fight when I review it. But I would say that it was the best way to win. I mean that I was able to make decisions on my own to avoid any [damage] and trouble from the challenger. I wish for 2022 to be a year that I become a unified

Kazuto Ioka kept his New Year's Eve tradition alive thanks to late replacement Ryoji Fukunaga.

NAOKI FUKUDA

Fukunaga (right) gave a valiant effort, but Ioka's superior skills and experience were too much to overcome.

champion. As I may already have a rain check on the [Ancajas] fight, I will be back to the gym soon."

★★★

Ioka-Ancajas wasn't the only title-unification bout to be held in Japan that was pushed back due to the surge of Omicron cases. Gennadiy Golovkin vs. Ryota Murata, which was scheduled for December 29 at the Saitama Super Arena, is currently in limbo.

The government will keep the restricted border control in effect at least until the end of February, which means we will be lucky to get the middleweight showdown in late March or April if it is to remain in Japan.

It's too bad the fight between The Ring's No. 1-rated Golovkin (41-1-1, 36 KOs) and No. 5-rated Murata (16-2, 13 KOs) did not happen when it was meant to take place. Murata, the popular 2012 Olympic gold medalist, was well-prepared for the future hall of famer from Kazakhstan.

Three tough sparring partners – Adrian Luna (23-8-2, 15 KOs), Jose de Jesus Macias (28-10-4, 14 KOs) and Misael Rodriguez (10-0, 5 KOs), the 2016 Olympic bronze medalist in the 165-pound weight class – were flown in from Mexico to help Murata to get ready for the biggest fight of his pro career.

Even though the postponement (announced on December 3) disappointed Murata, who had suffered other fight cancellations due to the pandemic, he remained in the gym with the hope that it could be rescheduled early in 2022. The three Mexican sparring partners also spent the holiday season working out at Murata's gym in Tokyo.

"The new date is still up in the air, but what I can do is to stay positive and appreciate this extra time to get myself more ready for the fight," Murata, who turned 36 on January 12, stated on promoter Teiken's official site.

★★★

Two bouts that were scheduled to be on the Golovkin-Murata undercard – WBO flyweight titleholder Junto Nakatani vs. Cristian Gonzalez and Masayuki Ito vs. Shuichiro Yoshino – will now co-headline a major show of their own sometime in April at a site to be determined, according to Kyodo News.

The doubleheader, which is already a big deal to the Japanese boxing industry and hardcore enthusiasts, will potentially reach new and casual fans by being streamed live to Japanese subscribers of Amazon Prime.

Nakatani (22-0, 17 KOs), whose first title defense was an impressive fourth-round TKO of seasoned former 108-pound beltholder Angel Acosta, will make his second defense against a lesser-experienced Mexican prospect. Gonzalez (14-1, 4 KOs) is only 22 years old but has won his last eight bouts.

Former WBO 130-pound beltholder Ito (27-3-1, 15 KOs) will take on Yoshino (14-0, 11 KOs), the OPBF and

Hopes are high that Golovkin vs. Murata happens in early 2022.

Japanese national lightweight champ, in a 135-pound bout.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Cristiano Ndombassy (left) was more of a danger to Roarke Knapp than most expected.

It has been a December to remember for South African boxing, unfortunately not only for the right reasons.

Popular junior middleweight Roarke Knapp and last-minute substitute Cristiano Ndombassy engaged in a classic shootout at Emperor's Palace in Gauteng on December 4. Knapp was supposed to meet streaking Brandon Thysse in a rematch of their 2019 encounter won by Thysse, but when Thysse tested positive for COVID-19, the Cape Town-based Angolan was brought in. He was expected to give Knapp some competitive rounds but not much more. How wrong everyone was!

Knapp appeared to be in cruise control by Round 2, landing combinations to the head and body against a strangely passive Ndombassy, who threw precious few punches.

Then all hell broke loose in the third round. After landing two left hook-right hand combinations, Ndombassy nailed Knapp with a right bang on the chin. The punch swiveled Knapp's head and his body twisted to the floor. It seemed over for him but, somehow, he clambered to his feet. His legs were all over the place and a follow up barrage put Knapp flat on his back for a second knockdown. Once again, he got up, only to go down moments later, the third time being ruled a slip. Ndombassy kept after him, and a pair of rights had Knapp sagging along the ropes and to the canvas, where he heard the mandatory eight count for the third time. He got up and made it to the bell, but the writing seemed to be on the wall.

Youth, fitness and lots of heart can serve you well, and a minute into the fourth, Knapp seemed to shake off the cobwebs and started fighting back with fire in his belly. Toward the end of the round, he had Ndombassy hurt and on the ropes, raining combinations to the head and body. It was dramatic stuff, straight out of a Rocky movie!

Then, at the start of the fifth, Ndombassy quit, his corner threw in the towel in disgust and Knapp was awarded the TKO victory.

The fight was for a regional WBA belt and as discussed at the pre-fight rules meeting, the three-knockdown rule was in effect, as was confirmed later in the press by fight supervisor in attendance Stan Christodoulou. The application of the rule was somehow lost on referee Tony Nyangiwe during the tumultuous third round. Had the rule been applied, Ndombassy would have been awarded a TKO victory.

The Ndombassy camp refused offers of a rematch, opting instead to lodge a protest with the WBA, seeking to have the result overturned. As of this writing, no acknowledgement, never mind an answer, has been received from the WBA according to Ndombassy's promoter, Jack Brice.

★★★

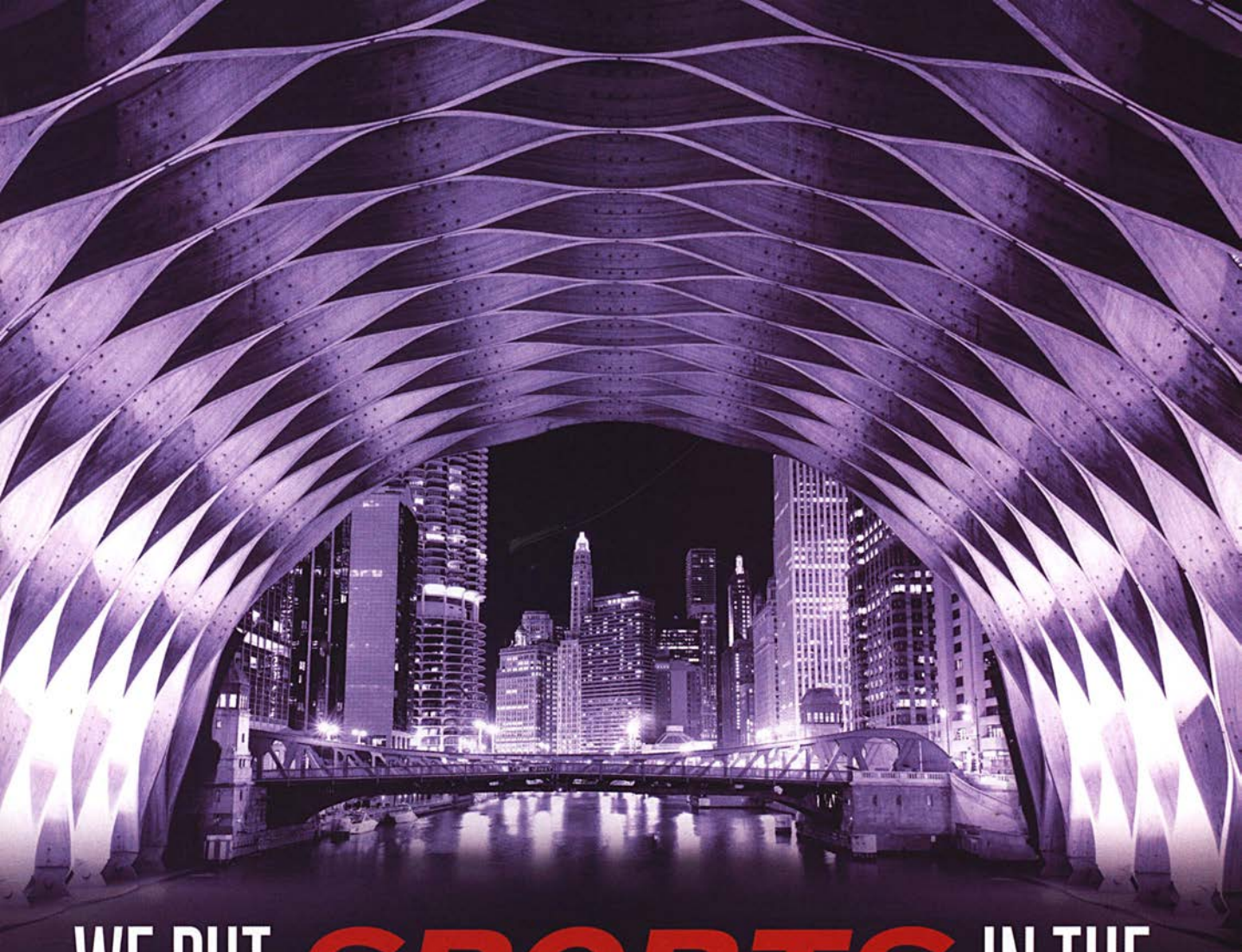
The same card saw the emergence of a new heavyweight prospect as Juan Roux blasted out the much bigger Wilhelm Nebe in the first round. It was a spectacular victory in front of the first live crowd since the pandemic, but fate had more in store for the young man nicknamed "The Rhino."

A mere two weeks later in Cape Town, Roux stepped in as a last-minute substitute against national champion Tian Fick after the original opponent got injured.

In one of the best local heavyweight fights in recent memory, Roux was tenacious against the taller and more experienced Fick. After a tentative start, his rapid-fire combination punching to the head and body gradually gave him the upper hand. Fick never stopped trying and had some sporadic success with his jab and the odd right hand, but he simply couldn't match the relentless pace of his younger opponent. After 12 rounds, Roux became the new South African heavyweight champion on a split decision, although it was hard to understand what fight the dissenting judge was watching.

Roux is now 6-0 with two knockouts, while Fick, suffering his first defeat, drops to 9-1.

2021 was a Cinderella story for the unknown youngster who started boxing simply to lose weight. He has now been picked up by Golden Gloves Promotions and is slated to fight Josh Pretorius in March on the undercard of Kevin Lerena's heavyweight debut against Bogdan Dinu. Motivated to build on his success in 2022, there is no doubt Roux is well-positioned to take the next step.



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THE CROWN AFFAIR:

When Michael Dokes scored a highly contentious first-round stoppage of Mike Weaver to lift the WBA heavyweight title in December 1982, the cries for a rematch were audible even before he was officially announced as the winner. Six months later, the return bout (pictured) took place outside The Dunes Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas and was the co-feature to Larry Holmes' Ring and WBC heavyweight title defense against Tim Witherspoon. Many felt that Weaver (left) had gained revenge, but Dokes retained his title on a 15-round majority draw.

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COMING UP

Their 154-pound championship fight ended in an unsatisfying draw, but Jermell Charlo and Brian Castano will go at it again on March 19.

FEBRUARY

FEB. 19 – Amir Khan vs. Kell Brook, welterweights, Manchester, England (Sky PPV).
FEB. 26 – Josh Taylor vs. Jack Catterall, junior welterweights (for Taylor's Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO titles), Glasgow, Scotland (ESPN+/Sky).
FEB. 26 – Roger Gutierrez vs. Chris Colbert, junior lightweights (for Gutierrez's WBA title), Carson, California (Showtime).
FEB. 27 – Lawrence Okolie vs. Michal Cieslak, cruiserweights (for Okolie's WBO title), Greenwich, England (DAZN).

MARCH

MARCH 4 – Jose Ramirez vs. Jose Pedraza, junior welterweights, Fresno, California (ESPN+).
MARCH 5 – Juan Francisco Estrada vs. Roman Gonzalez, junior bantamweights (for Estrada's Ring/WBA/WBC titles), San Diego (DAZN).
MARCH 12 – Leigh Wood vs. Michael Conlan, featherweights, Nottingham, England (DAZN).
MARCH 19 – Jermell Charlo vs. Brian Castano, junior middleweights (for Charlo's Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC and Castano's WBO titles), Los Angeles (Showtime).
MARCH 19 – Vergil Ortiz Jr. vs. Michael McKinson, welterweights, location TBA (DAZN).
MARCH 26 – Kiko Martinez vs. Josh Warrington, featherweights (for Martinez's IBF title), Leeds, England (DAZN).

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